

Name: Alert ID: TMML202403435274 CHICAGO (CBS) — Knowing he would soon be sentenced for a brazen \$23 million scam involving scores of phony pieces of sports memorabilia, an Arkansas con man looked at his oldest son in court and said, “I screwed it up.” Pausing and tapping his fingers on a table, John Rogers explained that he cut a deal with the feds that led him to wear a wire against dangerous people — even killers — because he hoped it would help him get out of prison in time for the high school junior’s last year of college. Then the feds caught him selling fake merchandise all over again this fall, putting an end to any such hope. U.S. District Judge Thomas Durkin called the move “monumentally stupid” on Wednesday, moments before he hammered Rogers with a 12-year sentence for a fraud of “breathtaking” proportions. He did so after Rogers also admitted, “I didn’t think of my son when I was doing these things.” When the hearing ended, Rogers gave a thumbs-up to the boy, who quickly left the courtroom where he had earlier called his father his “hero.” First charged in September 2016 for a scheme to use a fake Billy Sims Heisman Trophy as collateral for a \$100,000 loan, prosecutors say Rogers was more recently involved in a “new wave” of fraud that involved a phony Super Bowl I game ball and even “a fake Mickey Mantle silverware set.” Rogers, 44, wound up in federal jail here after a hearing on the matter last month. Rogers said he set out to create “fantasy items” — replicas — that would never fool the public. But he said he fell back into his old ways. He and his attorney, J. Blake Hendrix, also said Rogers has long battled a drug addiction. Rogers tested positive for cocaine in October, according to Hendrix, and Rogers said he brought cocaine along when he traveled to Chicago for last month’s hearing. “I know my words are shallow and may not be believed,” Rogers said. Rogers pleaded guilty to wire fraud last March. He made the fake Sims Heisman using an honorary Heisman given to announcer Al Helfer in 1960. He swapped out the trophy’s nameplate but ignored a dent on the left side of its base, as well as scratches and other marks. He also failed to replace a missing screw. The feds say Rogers had at least 26 victims, stealing \$23 million that he must now pay back in restitution. He said more fake merchandise remains on the market. Rogers’ case followed a yearslong FBI investigation into sports memorabilia auction houses such as Mastro Auctions in the western suburbs. Rogers secretly recorded Doug Allen, the former president of Mastro Auctions, who was sentenced to 57 months in prison last year. Hendrix also said Rogers wore a wire on other “very bad people.” Meanwhile, Rogers said he realized he had put himself in a position where he could no longer be a proper father to his children. But Durkin told Rogers, “I can’t care more about your children than you did.”