

Mobster gets boot

Appeals could delay extradition

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AN ITALIAN mobster once dubbed the Wayne Gretzky of organized crime was committed yesterday for extradition to his home country.

Justice David Watt made the ruling against Alfonso Caruana and dismissed his constitutional challenge.

Caruana's lawyers Joseph Neuberger and David Rose argued their 58-year-old client was deprived of a fair trial with a lawyer when Sicilian courts tried him in absentia.

"It is not part of the mandate of an extradition judge to consider foreign law," Watt said.

Caruana was a "member of the Caruana Contreras criminal organization first established in Venezuela in connection with Cosa Nostra," Watt said.

"It's a criminal organization that involves large quantity of drugs ... and with considerable profits."

Caruana controlled Swiss bank accounts that funnelled funds into the pockets of known drug traffickers, Watt noted.

But Caruana could still be in Canada for another year or two as his lawyers exhaust all appeals.

Neuberger said he'll be filing a challenge at the Court of Appeal and also making written submissions to Justice Minister Irwin Cotler to stave off his client's extradition.

If Caruana loses this extradition battle, he'll be sent to Italy to face a prison sentence — with no chance of appeal — until he's 79, Neuberger said.

The Italian case features a now-deceased former Mafia member who met Caruana once in 1969 as well as three "turncoat mob members" who have since joined the witness protection program in Italy and are unavailable for scrutiny by the defence, court heard.

Caruana was sentenced here to 18 years after he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to import and traffic Colombian cocaine in 2000. He was six days away from becoming eligible for day parole in April last year when police arrested him in Fenbrook prison to face the Italian charges alleging crimes between 1977 and 1986.



CARUANA
Part of Italian mafia

Caruana was sentenced to almost 22 years in July 1997 in Palermo on Mafia and heroin trafficking crimes.

He ran the Caruana-Cuntrera Mafia family from a large house in Woodbridge and arranged for shipments of Colombian drugs through Venezuela and into Canada.

The multimillion-dollar enterprise collapsed in July 1998 after months of wiretaps, surveillance and undercover work by a joint-forces anti-Mafia squad.

Crown attorney Robin Parker said the sensitive work of an RCMP-led joint forces operation, Project Omerta, would have been jeopardized if Caruana had been tipped off about the Sicilian trial in the mid-'90s.

Caruana's father, Leonardo, was a veteran member of the Cupola, the Mafia's ruling council in Sicily until he was murdered in 1981. Alfonso moved to Montreal in the late 1960s or early 1970s from Venezuela, then to Toronto in 1993.