

**September 2, 2004**

## ***Breaking News***

# **Criminal Case Against Bryant Dropped**

In a move that was widely anticipated by experts and those close to the case, the judge in the sexual assault trial against Kobe Bryant yesterday dropped criminal charges against the basketball star. The move came after prosecutors filed for dismissal, saying that Bryant's accuser was unwilling to continue because she feared her rights would be further violated during trial. The civil lawsuit she has brought against Bryant will proceed.

With jury selection underway and opening arguments just days away, Judge W. Terry Ruckriegle agreed to dismiss the case against the 26-year-old married basketball star. In response, Bryant issued a statement that says, in part, "I want to apologize to her for my behavior that night and for the consequences she has suffered in the past year. Although I truly believe this encounter between us was consensual, I recognize now that she did not and does not view this incident the same way I did ... I now understand how she feels that she did not consent to this encounter."

"None of us know what happened between Kobe Bryant and his accuser in that Colorado hotel room last year, but we do know that the court repeatedly failed the accuser in the months afterward," said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. "The judge's apologies do not change the fact that the court revealed her identity, publicized her sexual history, and subjected her to threats and harassment."

### **History**

Bryant was charged with felony sexual assault after an incident in June of 2003 in which the then-19-year-old hotel employee visited his room at a resort in Vail, Colorado. The two agree that she came to his room voluntarily and they kissed, but the accuser says Bryant then became violent and raped her. He initially told police that he did not have sexual intercourse with his accuser, but admitted otherwise when DNA tests cast doubt on his claim. He has consistently said the intercourse was consensual.

With more than 500 reporters covering the case, it had become a media circus. Several media outlets – most of them web sites – published the victim’s name and photograph. The results, according to her parents, were relentless death threats and constant harassment that forced her to leave her family and move from place to place in an effort to be safe.

In July, the court also weakened Colorado’s rape shield law, ruling that information on the victim’s sexual activity in the 72 hours before doctors examined her was admissible at trial. Bryant’s attorneys also hoped to make her physical and mental health history part of their case. On several occasions, the court erred in releasing documents containing the accuser’s name. In one incident, the court mistakenly distributed the transcript from a closed hearing about the victim’s sexual history to journalists. An apology from Judge Ruckriegle was met with anger from prosecutors and the accuser’s family.

Her father wrote a letter to the Judge that was published in the Vail Daily in August. It said, “I have watched as leak after harmful leak has gone unpunished. I have watched the defense attorneys manipulate the public opinion of my daughter with their pleadings on your web site while you did nothing. One of the most recent mistakes regarding the transcript of the defendant’s paid expert has been devastating to my daughter and my family. I don’t know if you understand the harm your staff has caused.”

Apparently, the mistakes eventually convinced the accuser to end the criminal case.

Copyright © 2004 Family Violence Prevention Fund.