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Saturday, April 19, 2008

Pontiac

Kid Rock winner of civil case

Milford woman denied damages

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- An Oakland Circuit Court jury deliberated only 90 minutes Friday before reaching a verdict in favor of recording artist Kid Rock, who was sued by a woman who claimed he grabbed and shoved her outside his Clarkston-area studio in March 2007.

Rock, whose real name is Robert Ritchie Jr., neatly dressed for court in a pinstriped suit and necktie, rather than his customary flip-flops, sports jerseys and pork-pie hat. But once all testimony was over, he didn't even wait around for the four men and three women to make up their minds. Ritchie walked out of the courthouse just a half-hour after the jury went behind closed doors to discuss the case against him by Kelly Ann Kozlowski of Milford, who sought damages for alleged assault and battery, intentional infliction of emotional distress and defamation.

"Just look at it out there," said Ritchie, gesturing out a glass window at a sun-splashed parking lot in explanation for his early exit.

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While defendants in civil cases aren't required to wait around for a verdict to be returned, it's usually customary when money is on the line. In the case of Ritchie -- a successful recording artist who sells out concerts and turns out platinum records -- the amount of potential damages could have been sizable.

Kozlowski and a friend met Ritchie after a Detroit Pistons game on March 7, 2007, at the Clarkston Union Bar & Grill. Kozlowski and the friend were invited to Ritchie's nearby studio to hear his as-yet unreleased "Rock N Roll Jesus" CD. But things went sour at the studio. Kozlowski claims Ritchie became upset when she announced she was going home.

Ritchie and witnesses told deputies Kozlowski had grown rude and belligerent and had to be asked to leave.

Everyone agrees Kozlowski was escorted out of the facility about 2 a.m. and she claims Ritchie grabbed her by the neck and pushed her up against a parked car and into a snow bank.

She did not report the incident to deputies until the next afternoon at 4:30 p.m. She testified Friday she wanted to discuss it with family and also had been drinking the night of her incident. Despite being concerned about Ritchie's star power and influence, she said she "knew in my heart it was the right thing to do."

"I was scared of the consequences," she told the jury, breaking into tears. "I didn't want it to be a big deal. All I wanted him to do was to get into trouble for what he did to me."

After a Sheriff's investigation could not determine an assault took place, Ritchie sued Kozlowski for filing a



Robert Ritchie (Kid Rock) talks to his attorney, William Horton. Ritchie walked out of the courthouse a half-hour after the jury started deliberating, despite the potential of a large reward for the plaintiff. (Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News)

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police report and defaming him. Kozlowski countersued for damages and when Ritchie failed to show up for a deposition or court hearing, Judge Shalina Kumar found him in default. That meant actual liability in the incident did not have to be proved by Kozlowski's attorneys, Drew and Scott Norton, only that Ritchie was responsible for any physical or emotional damages suffered by Kozlowski.

"He (Ritchie) was a lightning rod for a celebrity shakedown," said Ritchie's attorney, William Horton, who chopped away at Kozlowski's claims, noting she never suffered any scrapes, cuts or bruises and even declined medical attention by a deputy.

Kozlowski also never missed work from the incident, noted Horton, who told the jury Kozlowski's "reputation" was questionable, noting several incidents of trouble with police, a fiancée -- even an incident in which she shot a neighbor with a BB gun when she was 12.

Psychiatrist Dr. Gerald Shiner testified for Kozlowski that she exhibited all the classic traits of someone suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome -- normally associated with police officers, soldiers or disaster victims. On cross examination by Horton, Shiner said he had only one 45-minute meeting with Kozlowski.

Kozlowski, visibly upset by the jury's verdict, left immediately afterward and did not answer reporters' questions.

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