

In defense of the prominent

Three lawyers set bar for helping famous win cases

By Sue Lindsay Rocky Mountain News April 18, 2008

When Denver sports figures get into trouble, who are they gonna call?

A handful of lawyers have established reputations for getting high-profile clients off the legal hook.

Among them:

- * Dan Recht, currently representing Carmelo Anthony in his DUI arrest this week.
- * Harvey Steinberg, who has represented dozens of members of the Denver Broncos and other teams over the years.
- * Pamela Mackey, who represented Patrick Roy and Kobe Bryant.

Steinberg and Recht agreed to address general questions about their work. Their answers were edited for space and clarity; Mackey did not return calls.

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Dan Recht

Denver lawyer Dan Recht began working in Colorado as a public defender in 1983 and opened his own law firm in 1987.

In addition to representing sports figures, Recht successfully represented the Tattered Cover Book Store in 2002 in its battle with police over whether they should be able to search store records for the buying habits of people under investigation.

How did you start representing professional athletes?

Up until four years ago, I did not follow professional basketball. It was about that time that my wife and I came home late one night and heard the following message on our telephone: "Mr. Recht, this is Kiki Vandeweghe, would you please call me at the following number as soon as possible."

I confess to being amazingly ignorant at the time and didn't know who he was. I turned to my wife, incredulous that someone would leave such a message, and said "who the hell is Kiki Vandeweghe?" Fortunately, she was smarter than me and knew who Kiki was. (Vandeweghe was general manager of the Nuggets.) In any event, Kiki was calling to have me help a player with an emergency problem and I have helped Nuggets players ever since.

How many pro athletes have you represented?

I've probably represented a dozen or so professional athletes, mostly Nuggets players, a player from the Broncos, a player from the Rockies also.

What charges do they typically face?

Professional athletes that get into trouble generally are facing misdemeanors, less serious crimes. It ranges from bar fights, to traffic matters, to drug possession, etc.

What about representing these clients makes them different from other clients?

Professional athletes live in a fishbowl. While for the vast majority of people a traffic matter will be a private matter that they can deal with privately, for a professional athlete it becomes front page news. It wouldn't be easy for any mature, middle-aged person to live under the constant glare of public scrutiny. And, it is that much harder for a young man.

What are they as a group like to represent?

The players I have represented are without exception polite, respectful, cooperative and genuinely apologetic for what they have done wrong.

What is the most interesting or rewarding part of this work?

It is an honor to work with the people that have the dedication and natural talent to be among the very best in the world at what they do. And, for some reason, my children and their friends are more impressed with my representation of pro athletes than they are in my representation of bookstores or businessmen or lawyers or doctors.

What is the toughest part of your job?

The complexion and nature of my representation changes dramatically when a case is public and in the media. Often the police and prosecutors can be tougher on celebrities than they are on the normal person out of fear that they will be criticized in the media for giving a celebrity preferential treatment.

Because of media attention to these clients, do you feel obligated to make a statement or hold a news conference because of their celebrity or status as role models?

All too often the media is left with a distorted or inaccurate view of the facts due to the one sided nature of some police reports. Therefore, I often feel compelled to give a statement to the media that gives a truer rendition of the situation.

If you are in need of an experienced business litigator or criminal defense attorney, please call Recht & Kornfeld today.

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