



Michigander Joins O.J. Simpson Saga: Plan to Sell Videos May Hit Legal Snag

By Kelley L. Carter, Detroit Free Press

Sep. 25--O.J. Simpson was looking to rehabilitate his battered public image. Norman Pardo figured he could help and maybe down the line make a few bucks in the process.

Thus began a series of events that would eventually put Oakland County resident Pardo front-and-center in the latest twist in the Simpson saga -- and leave him tangled in Simpson's legal and financial woes.

It all started a little more than five years ago, when Pardo, who was living in Florida, met Simpson because they had the same attorney. At the time, it'd been about five years since Simpson was acquitted of the murders of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend Ronald Goldman.

But Simpson had lost a wrongful death civil lawsuit in 1997 that held him liable for their deaths. He was ordered to pay the Brown and Goldman families a total of \$33.5 million. That left the former Heisman Trophy winner, NFL star and actor looking to sweeten his soured public image.

The Mt. Clemens-born Pardo began to help Simpson book appearances at concert halls, bars and clubs all over the country. Pardo's fee was that he got to videotape Simpson in the process.

Now Pardo, who is building a home in Clarkston, is ready to make the footage public via his Web site, www.judgeoj.com, where he's selling DVDs of the unaired footage -- without Simpson's blessing.

That decision has thrown him into a convoluted legal battle involving Simpson's publicity rights. In recent weeks, Pardo has been interviewed on CNN's "Nancy Grace" and Court TV. And news of his Simpson tapes was splashed across the cover of the New York Post on Aug. 6. Since early August -- that's when Pardo posted teasers of the footage on his Web site -- his site has averaged about 150,000 hits per day.

The planned sale of the footage could mean big bucks for Pardo. And if so, the Goldman family might try and go after that cash.

Pardo's spoils

Filming started back in 2001, when Pardo wondered what would happen if he put Simpson in the back of a convertible and had someone drive him down a main street in Philadelphia.

The result? Hundreds, possibly thousands of fans came out to greet the former athlete and get autographs and snap shots with disposable cameras. Some yelled "not guilty!" into a camera filming the scene.

Over the course of nearly five years, he stocked up more than 70 hours of raw footage.

In a few minutes of tape provided to the Free Press, the footage ranges from the mundane to the mildly racy.

In one clip, Simpson is inside the shelter of a bus stop, with apparently no one willing to stop. In another he talks about former Los Angeles police Detective Mark Fuhrman using racial epithets.

In one set in what appears to be a nightclub, three young girls grind on top of Simpson and he yells out "I love my life! Isn't life wonderful? Thank you, Jesus!" In others, he talks candidly about those who prosecuted him back in the mid-1990s and other celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey.

Pardo, a self-taught film producer, used to be the chief executive officer of an Internet search engine called Spiderboy.com. A real-estate investor, Pardo eventually branched out into the entertainment industry, promoting musicians and artists.

Up until last year, Pardo secured the appearances for Simpson. Simpson was paid by the venues, mostly in the form of hotel stays, meals and transportation.

"I learned that I had a lot more guts than I thought I did," Pardo said. "Some of the places we went I was amazed to come out alive," he said, talking about some people's varying reactions to Simpson.

"I came up with an idea that I would find him shows, gigs, and I would see what happened. And it turned out that I filmed him everywhere," Pardo said. "From limos to tour buses. Hotels. Nightclubs. Restaurants. So there's a ton of intimate stuff. A lot of the time, he forgot the camera was on."

At one point, Pardo had hopes to air a 13-part reality TV series on Simpson, but those plans fell through. Simpson didn't want any part of it, and they had a falling-out, Pardo said. Simpson's attorney did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Where things get complicated

The family of Ron Goldman filed a motion Sept. 5 in Los Angeles County Superior Court to acquire Simpson's publicity rights. Essentially, the family wants to tap into the money Simpson makes through being a celebrity. If their motion is granted, they may go after Pardo's tapes.

Thus far, the Goldman family has collected a little more than \$300,000 from its share of the wrongful death settlement, which is estimated at about \$20 million plus interest.

"The fact remains that we have a \$30- to \$40-million judgment sitting out there than has never been paid," said Goldman family attorney Jonathan Polak, whose estimates include interest. "What we have done is come up with a way for Simpson to pay for that judgment with the very thing that he used to avoid judgment in the beginning and that is his fame.

"We feel that's his most important asset. ... And it is our intention to take that away from him."

Whatever the outcome of the motion, Pardo and his attorney say it shouldn't affect Pardo's ability to sell the tapes and keep the money. For one, Simpson isn't getting any of the cash from the DVD sales, they say. Plus, the courts would not retroactively award rights Simpson gave to Pardo years ago.

Nonetheless, Pardo has added another wrinkle to the case with an offer he said he's made to the Goldman family: The Goldmans get the tapes and Pardo gets the multimillion dollar judgment they've never been able to collect on.

Why would he make such an offer? Pardo's attorney Marc Beginin, a Birmingham-based entertainment lawyer, explained the thinking:

"Initially, based on the reports in the media, there was the inference that Norman was selling these

tapes and somehow the money was going to make its way back to O.J.," Beginin said. "So Norman and I discussed the matter and we said, 'How can we prove it to them that that's not the case?' Fred Goldman wants to inflict pain on O.J. O.J. doesn't want these tapes to come out because its detrimental to him and his publicity. We said, 'OK, Goldman, you take the tapes. You give us the judgment.' "

Whether or not Pardo could collect on the judgment is "beside the point," Beginin said.

If the Goldmans don't take the deal, Pardo is still going to sell the footage. Right now, the tapes are being stored at an Oakland County bank. The two DVDs are set to go on sale on his Web site Oct. 3 for \$12.95 and \$16.95 a pop.

Polak, the Goldmans' attorney, declined to comment on Pardo's tapes or his offer, but said in a statement: "We have not received any formal or informal offer from Mr. Pardo. For all we know this is merely one more publicity stunt wherein someone is attempting to profit off of Simpson and his infamy, perhaps to the benefit of Simpson himself."

Beginin called that accusation ridiculous.

"The meritless action filed to O.J.'s rights to publicity is a publicity stunt in and of itself," he said.

The motion goes back to California court Oct. 17, with Simpson's attorneys likely contesting. Pardo's attorney also is contemplating another move.

"We're talking about doing a legal move called intervention. Norman Pardo would intervene as an interested third party because the results of the litigation may have a substantial impact on him," Beginin said. "The Goldmans have made it very clear that they want these tapes."

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