

# Simpson Civil Suit Deposition Postponed

LOS ANGELES - O.J. Simpson's next legal hurdle has been postponed to give his new lawyer time to get up-to-date on the case before tackling the former football star's civil suits.

specializes in civil cases, agreed recently to represent Simpson at the request of his lead criminal defense lawyer, Johnnie Cochran.

Simpson was to have been deposed on Monday but Robert

Tourtlot, the lawyer representing the family of Ron Goldman in their wrongful death lawsuit, said on NBC's "Today" show that the deposition has been postponed.

Plaintiffs in civil wrongful

death cases only have to prove a "likelihood" that the defendant was the killer, a much lower burden of proof than the "beyond reasonable doubt" in criminal cases. While Simpson faces no threat of jail in a civil trial, he could be forced to testify, would need more than "reasonable doubt" to convince a jury to exonerate him and may end up paying millions in damages if he loses.

The suit — which says Simpson's conduct was "willful, wanton and outrageous beyond

the ability of ordinary human beings to comprehend" — is one of three civil actions that he faces but is the only one likely to make it to trial.

Speculation is that the family of Nicole Brown Simpson will drop their suit as part of their to reconcile with Simpson for the good of the two young children he fathered with his ex-wife. And experts believe a suit filed by Goldman's mother, Susan Ruffo, who is divorced from his father, will be dismissed because of her long estrangement from her 25-

year-old son.

Simpson's acquittal on murder charges in criminal court in the deaths of his ex-wife and her friend could help him contest the civil suits.

The Goldmans' suit, which was filed last May, asks for unspecified damages to send a message "that such vicious and outrageous savagery inflicted on one human being shall be met with the severest of civil penalties."

It could take a year or more before the case goes to trial.

## Racially Charged Arson Trial Begins In Alabama

MONTGOMERY - A young black man, swept up by his father's militant rhetoric, set fire to a high school in Wedowee, Ala., last year in a violent show of opposition to the school's white authorities, a federal jury heard Tuesday.

The allegation, by assistant U.S. Attorney David Allred, marked the beginning of the arson case against Christopher Lynn Johnson, a 25-year-old poultry plant worker whose father led protests against Randolph County High School.

If convicted, the Ashland, Ala., man would face up to 20 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines for arson, plus 10 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines for possessing an unregistered destructive device.

Racial turmoil surged to the surface of life in the eastern Alabama town of Wedowee in February 1994, when high school principal Hulond Humphries threatened to cancel the spring prom if interracial couples showed up.

Blacks held protest marches and mass meetings and set up an alternative school when the

largely white Randolph County School Board refused to discipline Humphries.

By the end of July, the school board had been forced into a \$25,000 civil rights settlement with a mixed-race teenager whom Humphries allegedly had called "a mistake." The U.S. Justice Department later charged the school board with racial discrimination in federal court.

Then, in early August, Randolph County High School burned to the ground. Humphries was soon reassigned and the FBI were pursuing a federal arson investigation.

The defendant's father, the Rev. Emmett Johnson, who calls himself the Alabama commander of the Black Panther Militia, claims his son has been framed because of his own activist role in the black community.

Others in the local black community, citing FBI attempts to discredit slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King in the 1960s, also have voiced scepticism about the case.

But prosecutors intend to

produce as evidence hours of tape-recorded conversations in which the son is incriminated (See Alabama Case, Page 21)

## Officer In King Beating Released From Prison

LOS ANGELES - Former police sergeant Stacey Koon, convicted in the March 1991 beating of black motorist Rodney King, was released from federal prison Monday and transferred to a halfway house to serve the remainder of his 30-month prison term.

King's beating by four white police officers was captured on videotape and subsequently led to the 1992 Los Angeles riots a year later, in which 56 people were killed and damage was estimated at \$1 billion.

A spokeswoman at the federal prison in Sheridan, Ore., where Koon had been held since 1993, said: "As of today, Mr. Koon is no longer with us."

Koon did not take part in the beating but was convicted of violating King's civil rights because he directed the three officers who repeatedly hit the motorist with their batons and kicked and pummelled him as he lay on the ground.

Koon was being transferred to a halfway house in Rubidoux, about 60 miles east of Los Angeles.

Former officer Lawrence Powell, also sentenced to 30 months in prison for the beating, was released to a halfway house on Sept. 26.

Koon, who has a wife and five children, will be able to receive daily visits from his family and he will be eligible to receive weekend passes to go home, a Federal Bureau of Prisons spokesman said. He will be released from the halfway on December 14, as will Powell.

The two could be forced to return to prison, however, if the U.S. Supreme Court decides they should be resentenced. Federal authorities appealed the lenient sentences — Koon and Powell could have been jailed for seven years — and the Supreme Court is expected to rule on the matter next year.

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