

# Johnson testifies in man's fraud trial

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. (AP) - During testimony interrupted when a cross-examining lawyer asked him to sign a basketball, Magic Johnson called a foul Friday on the president of a speakers bureau who allegedly cheated him out of \$30,000.

The retired basketball great was the latest celebrity to take the stand in federal court in White Plains against Alan Walker, who is accused of 68 counts of fraud for failing to pay the people he booked through his Program Corporation of America.

Previous witnesses claiming losses have included CBS newsman Andy Rooney, former Sen. Carol Moseley Braun and poet Nikki Giovanni. Still to come are James Earl Jones and Erin Brockovich.

Johnson caused the biggest courtroom buzz so far. Federal employees flocked to the gallery for his testimony and courtroom artists frantically sketched him. There was a gasp when he mounted the steps to the witness stand and stood, in a blue pinstriped suit, to take his oath. At 6-foot-9, he towered over Judge Colleen McMahon, who's about 5-foot-5.

When prosecutor Daniel Dorsky asked him his line of business, Johnson mentioned owning Starbucks and Burger King franchises.

"Did you have a career in basketball?" Dorsky prodded, to which Johnson said, "I think I did, yes." As the jury laughed, he recounted his championships with Michigan State and the Los Angeles Lakers.

Johnson testified that Walker's firm booked him to speak on Nov. 19, 2002, at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Ill. He was paid \$5,000 up front, with

\$30,000 more to come.

Johnson, whose career was cut short when he tested positive for HIV, said he spoke to the students about HIV and AIDS and the event "was wonderful."

Like the other prosecution witnesses, Johnson testified that when he realized he hadn't been paid, even though the booking firm had been paid by the university, he was given a variety of excuses. He resorted to lawyers to demand payment and thought about suing, "But at the end of the day it would have cost me more," he said.

Because of his experience with the 67-year-old Walker, Johnson said he now makes speeches only when he's paid in full in advance.

Defense attorney Kerry Lawrence, who is trying to show that Walker did not intend to defraud the speakers, got Johnson to admit that as a businessman, he had incurred other bad debts. He tried to get him to say that the episode with Walker amounted to "a bad business decision."

"Monetary-wise, yes," Johnson said, "but for the students, no."

Lawrence finished his questioning by telling Johnson that his 10-year-old son wouldn't forgive him if he didn't ask the star for an autograph. The result was a rare sight in a federal courtroom: a small basketball being tossed by the defense attorney to the judge's clerk, then signed by the sitting witness.

Outside court, Johnson said of his lost \$30,000, "God has blessed me and I will survive this. But a lot of the other people, they base their living on this. ... Something has to happen to people who swindle people out of their money."

# Women

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York-based women's rights group that nominated Mohamed for the Ginetta Sagan Award. By educating young people, the GECPD hopes to promote a more open debate about FGM and women's rights in Somalia.

"We must use education as the vehicle, to bring young people on board to take over, and we must promote the good traditions as well. Somali culture has very good values, such as respect, sharing and support. But it is unacceptable to continue female genital mutilation. And to say no, that needs courage, commitment, and principally belief," she emphasized. Hawa Aden Mohamed collected the 11th Ginetta Sagan Award last Friday at Amnesty International's annual general meeting in Austin, Texas. Sagan was a founder of Amnesty International USA. As a member of the Italian anti-Fascist Resistance, she was imprisoned and tortured during World War II.

# Powell tests pace car in Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) - Former Secretary of State Colin Powell knows the Corvette convertible pace car he'll drive at the Indianapolis 500 has huge advantage over his own Corvette coupe. And it has to do with speed.

"I got it up to 110, 115 (mph)," Powell said Saturday at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where he tested the pace car alongside three-time Indy winner Johnny Rutherford. "My other car, my real car at home, I'll never be able to do that with it. I'm just going to have to be content to keep it within the speed limit."

Powell said the car compared with his own — except for the noticeable rush of air at high speed. He said he felt comfortable driving the car, though he would have "butterflies" on race day. The Indy 500, he said, is "as American as apple pie."

"It's going to be hard to get me off the track on the day of the race," Powell said of the May 29 event. "But know-



Former Secretary of State Colin Powell waits to drive the pace car at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

ing what's behind me ... at 230 mph, you've got to get out of the way as fast as you can."

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