

Pugilistic Pacers given probation over melee

ROCHESTER HILLS, Mich. (AP) - Indiana Pacers players Ron Artest, Jermaine O'Neal and Stephen Jackson were sentenced to a year's probation Friday, plus 60 hours of community service and \$250 fines for their roles in one of the worst brawls in U.S. sports history.

The three — all of whom entered pleas of no contest — were also ordered to undergo anger management counseling, although Oakland County assistant prosecutor John Pietrofesa said Artest had already completed the counseling as part of his NBA suspension.

"We're very satisfied with the resolution today," Pietrofesa said. "They decided to take responsibility and to move forward, and that's probably the best thing for everyone involved."

The brawl took place Nov. 19 during a game against the Detroit Pistons at The Palace of Auburn Hills last year.

Before sentencing, Judge

Julie Nicholson reminded the players that whether they like it or not, they are seen as role models and owe it to their fans to behave appropriately.

O'Neal said he was looking forward to putting the brawl behind him and moving on, and that the community service would not be difficult because he already enjoys volunteering.

Jackson did not respond to questions from reporters as he left the court; Artest said only, "I just want to go home."

A no-contest plea in Michigan is not an admission of guilt but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

A fourth player charged in the brawl, David Harrison, faces an Oct. 3 hearing. A fifth, Anthony Johnson, pleaded no contest last week to a count of misdemeanor assault and battery and is scheduled to be sentenced Oct. 7. Prosecutors have recommended that Johnson perform community service and

serve probation, along with paying fines and court costs.

All the players were charged with misdemeanor assault and battery, which carries a maximum sentence of 93 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

But prosecutors have said community service makes more sense than jail time.

Pietrofesa added that the sanctions placed on the players by the NBA were taken into account when negotiating the sentences.

Artest was suspended for the rest of the season, Jackson for 30 games, O'Neal for 25 and Johnson for five. The league did not suspend Harrison.

An arbitrator later reduced O'Neal's suspension to 15 games, and it was upheld in federal court.

Several fans also were charged in the brawl that started after Detroit Pistons center Ben Wallace shoved Artest following a hard foul.

After the players were

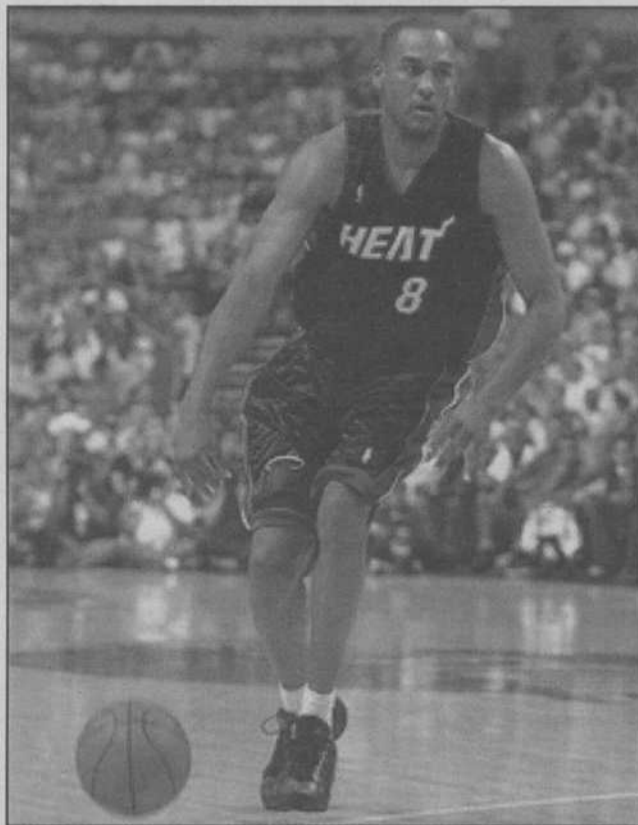
separated, Artest was doused with a beverage and rushed into the stands after the man he thought had thrown the drink. Some of his teammates joined him in the stands and clashed with fans on the court.

Charlie Haddad, one of the fans authorities say was punched by two Indiana players after he went on the court, attended Friday's hearing and sentencing. He submitted a written statement to the court questioning why he

received a harsher sentence than the players did.

Haddad was sentenced in March to two years' probation and 100 hours of community service, plus 10 consecutive weekends in a county work program for violating a local ordinance against entering a performance space.

"It's been horrible," Haddad said outside of court, when asked how his life has been since the brawl. "I thought I was the victim."



Steve Smith, known for his long-range shooting, is retiring.

Smith to end career after 14 campaigns

DETROIT-National Basketball Association veteran Steve Smith, whose solid playing career may have been exceeded by his exceptional citizenship, will retire on Friday.

A 14-year veteran, former All-Star and NBA champion, won the 1998 J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award and the 2002 NBA Sportsmanship Award.

Smith began last season with the expansion Charlotte Bobcats and during the season, he was traded to Miami, where he began his career in 1991.

Smith's best season was 1997-98 with Atlanta, when he averaged 20.1 points, 4.2 rebounds and 4.1 assists and made his only all-star appearance.

A 1992 All-Rookie Team selection, Smith was a member of Team USA at the 1994 World Championships and the 2000 Olympics, both of which won gold medals. He was a reserve on the 2003 NBA champion San Antonio Spurs.

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