

Jailed T.I., West, Common win hip-hop awards

ATLANTA (AP) - Despite rapper T.I.'s absence, the show went on at the second-annual BET Hip-Hop Awards — even when he was scheduled to perform.

The self-proclaimed "King of the South," who was up for nine nominations, won two awards. But he couldn't accept any trophies or make the planned performance after being arrested by federal authorities early Saturday.

T.I. was taken into custody in a shopping center parking lot where federal officials said he planned to pick up machine guns and silencers he had his bodyguard buy for him.

Even though the Atlanta-based rapper was present at the Civic Center, where the event was held, he became noticeably absent from the red carpet festivities before the show.

The news of T.I. being arrested rippled throughout the event. Rapper KRS-One, who received BET's "I am Hip Hop" Icon Award, learned about the raid just before he showed up.

KRS-One, whose real name is Lawrence Parker, said the fellow rapper's legal woes should not reflect on

Rapper

(Continued from Page 3)
count.

U.S. Attorney David Nahmias said at a press conference at ATF's Atlanta headquarters after the hearing that Harris was not a target in the investigation until four days before his arrest. Though the defendant is high-profile, authorities emphasized that the crime of which he is accused is fairly common.

Nahmias said that Harris' notoriety "really doesn't matter as to the merit of his prosecution."

"The evidence was followed and it led to Mr. Harris," he said.

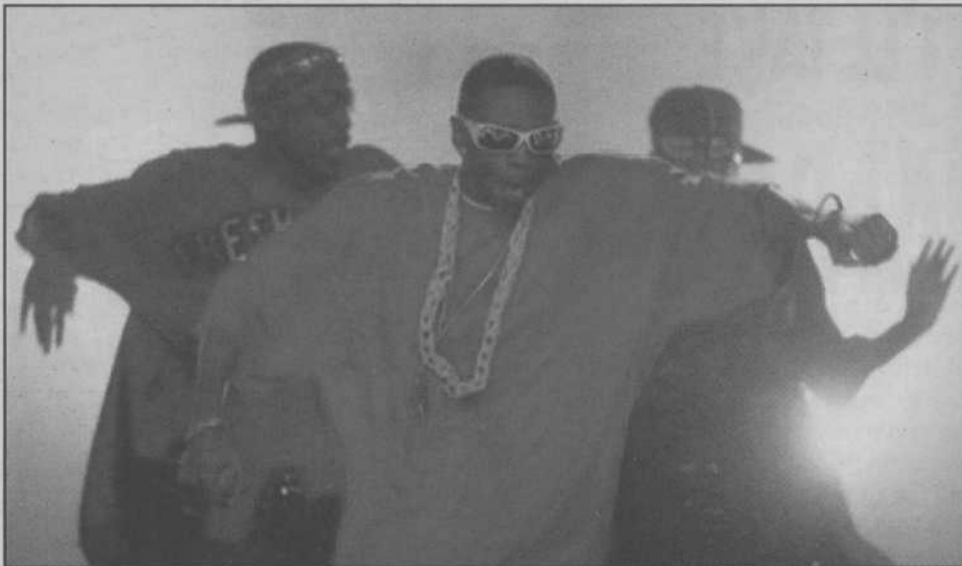
Agents with the ATF arrested Harris in midtown Atlanta. Authorities say other nine more firearms — including three allegedly found in his vehicle at the time of his arrest and six allegedly found in the bedroom closet at his suburban Atlanta home. ATF agents displayed the arsenal of rifles, revolvers and pistols during the press conference.

The arrest resulted from an investigation that began this month when a federal firearms dealer contacted the ATF about a man inquiring about buying a machine gun without registering the weapon as required, according to a criminal complaint filed Saturday in U.S. District Court in Atlanta.

After attempting to purchase several machine guns from an undercover ATF agent, the unnamed individual — who said he had been working as a bodyguard for Harris since July 2007 — was arrested and began cooperating with the government and said that he was buying the machine guns and silencers for Harris.

Harris allegedly brokered the deals through the bodyguard because he is a convicted felon. It is a violation of federal law for a convicted felon to have another person purchase or acquire firearms on their behalf.

Saturday's arrest came on what was supposed to be a day of revelry for T.I., who turned 27 on Sept. 25 and is the co-CEO of Grand Hustle Records. Despite his arrest, the rapper, who was up for nine nominations, won two awards at the recent BET Hip-Hop Awards.



Rapper Soulja Boy performs during the BET Hip Hop Awards on Saturday in Atlanta.

the industry as a whole.

"I'm saddened anytime I hear of a hip-hopper being locked up or somehow stunted in his life or his growth," he told The Associated Press. "I hope he wasn't into nothing crazy."

Chicago rapper Common, who won the CD of the year award along with T.I., tried to lend his support.

"I salute my guy T.I., who also won, wherever he is," said Common, while raising up his trophy. He also won lyricist of the year.

Other artists who were supposed to perform with T.I. still pulled off the performance.

As Wyclef Jean stood on stage to enact T.I.'s song, "You Know What It Is," host and comedian Katt Williams pranced across the stage dressed like T.I. trying to impersonate him as the crowd burst into laughter.

Alfamega still took the stage with Busta Rhymes for the song "Hurt." As the two rapped, many of the audience members stood seemingly puzzled at T.I.'s absence.

Kanye West was a winner in two categories — best live performance and hip-hop video. After West got his trophy for best hip-hop video,

he said he thought the video for UGK's "International Players," featuring OutKast, should have been chosen over his.

"I didn't deserve this award above them. They do instead of me," said West, who is typically known more for comments that critics call arrogant.

But Big Boi of OutKast returned the favor to West by giving him the award back saying, "You worked too hard for this. No, you deserve it."

The Hip Hop Awards aired Wednesday.

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