

# Star

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edly beating Rihanna.

"Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding the incident last month has shifted the focus from the music to whether he should be allowed to be among those nominated," a statement from his representatives read.

At 19, Brown is already a multiplatinum star who has not only dominated music, but made the leap to film in movies like "Stomp the Yard" and "This Christmas." He was a favorite of kids for his lithe voice, danceable beats and formidable dance skills; of young girls for his handsome looks; and of parents, because of his clean-cut image.

That winning combination helped him rack up album sales and awards: *Billboard* named him as its artist of the year for 2008. But figures show his overall audience, if not his fan base, has shrunk since his arrest. A leaked photo showing the battered face of Rihanna didn't help, and an affidavit released last week included details that highlighted the apparent brutality of the attack.

While Brown didn't have any new music out at the time of his arrest, his top hit "Forever" was still getting substantial radio play at the time. According to *Billboard's* Hot 100 Recurrent Airplay chart, the song was slowly drifting down, and was at No. 14 before the arrest, for a radio audience of about 16 million people.

According to *Billboard*, right after the arrest, the song plummeted from 14 to 58, or an audience of about 9 million. It is now off the chart.

Even having Brown featured on a song may be a bad move: Jive Records labelmate T-Pain, who did a duet with Brown called

"Freeze," is offering an alternative version to radio stations that deletes Brown, according to people inside the radio industry who requested anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the situation.

Bill Werde, the editor in chief for *Billboard*, said it may be too early to say whether the severe damage done to his career in the short term will affect Brown permanently.

"People's memories can be short, and I think sometimes an amazing hit can trump even people's expectations," he said Wednesday. "That said, Chris Brown is a guy who sort of developed his career around a very clean image, and an image that was safe for teens and tweens. ... When you have an artist whose career has been so predicated on keeping a clean image, this is a little bit of a tougher hurdle to get over."

Howard Bragman, veteran Hollywood publicist, damage-control specialist and author of the book "Where's My Fifteen Minutes," said Brown's youth may also be an asset to him in the long run if he makes a sincere attempt at rehabilitation.

"I do think he can come back from this, I think if he made the mistakes people think he made," he said. "I think he is young enough and talented enough; eventually there are people who will forgive you."

Rihanna may endure a challenging road herself whenever she finally decides to relaunch her equally white-hot career. Already, she had seen her image transformed from pop's femme fatale to domestic violence victim whose decision to go back to her alleged attacker has been endlessly called into question.

"What I think the caution is she has is not to let this incident define her. And I think that's the biggest risk to her career," said Bragman.

An apparent reconciliation with Brown may only exacerbate that risk. Rap mogul Diddy confirmed he let the couple use his home to "talk about a situation they're in," and producer Polow da Don told the *Los Angeles Times* he was working with both stars on a duet (however, *People.com*, citing sources it did not name, said the couple has not yet recorded a duet that was penned for them to be included on Brown's new album.)

"I think people are critical of her, saying, 'Oh my god, you're crazy, what are you doing?'" said Cori Murray, entertainment editor for *Essence* magazine. "Then there are people who are like ...they don't want to pass judgment on her because they don't know the whole situation."

While neither representative for the couple would comment on whether the couple was indeed reunited or recording together, that hasn't stopped others from weighing in on the situation.

Oprah Winfrey is devoting an entire show Thursday "to all the Rihannas of the world" and on an episode last week, warned Rihanna:

"Love doesn't hurt, and if a man hits you once, he will hit you again."

On Tuesday's episode of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," the host grilled Diddy about reports that he had lent his house to the couple to reconcile, and expressed her outrage about it in an intense exchange with the rap mogul: "I was a huge fan's of Chris' ... but to hit a girl," DeGeneres said, "... I don't want any girl out there thinking it's OK to go back to a guy who hit her."

Blogs have questioned everything from her mind-set to her sanity, but Werde said Rihanna still has overwhelming support and sympathy.

Like Brown, Rihanna, 21, is between projects. But she still has singles in the *Billboard's* top 50 — her solo hit "Disturbia" (co-written by Brown) and "Live Your Life" with T.I. And the multiplatinum selling singer was recently featured in a new ad by CoverGirl, for which she is a spokeswoman.

"I don't really expect Rihanna to face any hurdles here. It's pretty tragic what happened to her, and I'm certainly not about to try an alleged victim," Werde said.

"I don't think that people are going to judge her harshly... You can't blame the victim in any situation, especially in a domestic abuse situation."

# Bits 'n' Pieces

## Judge orders rapper 'C-Murder' to remain jailed

A Louisiana judge has ordered the rapper once known as C-Murder to remain in jail for allegedly breaking the rules of his house arrest. Authorities testified Wednesday that they lost a signal from rapper Corey Miller's monitor device for about 10 minutes early Monday. Miller is scheduled for trial April 20 on a second-degree murder charge in the death of 16-year-old Steve Thomas during a 2002 brawl at a nightclub in Harvey. As a condition of his \$500,000 bond, he was restricted to his grandmother's home. Attorney Ron Rakosky claimed the 37-year-old was home sleeping and there was an equipment malfunction that caused the loss of signal. Miller has generally used the name C-Miller since his arrest. He has a new CD and has written a novel.



C-Murder

## Money being raised for Richard Pryor movie starring Eddie Murphy

The word emerging from Hollywood is that top writer-producer Bill Condon is raising funds for a new movie on the life of comedic legend Richard Pryor. Condon is reportedly pitching the script for "Richard Pryor: Is It Something I Said" to studio subsidiaries and independent distributors around Hollywood. Meanwhile, *Entertainment Weekly* is reporting that Condon is also trying to get comic-actor Eddie Murphy to play the starring role. Condon most recently wrote and directed the movie "Dreamgirls." Reportedly, he is trying to raise between \$25 million and \$30 million before starting work on the Pryor film.



Eddie Murphy

## Chris Brown withdraws from Nickelodean Award nominations

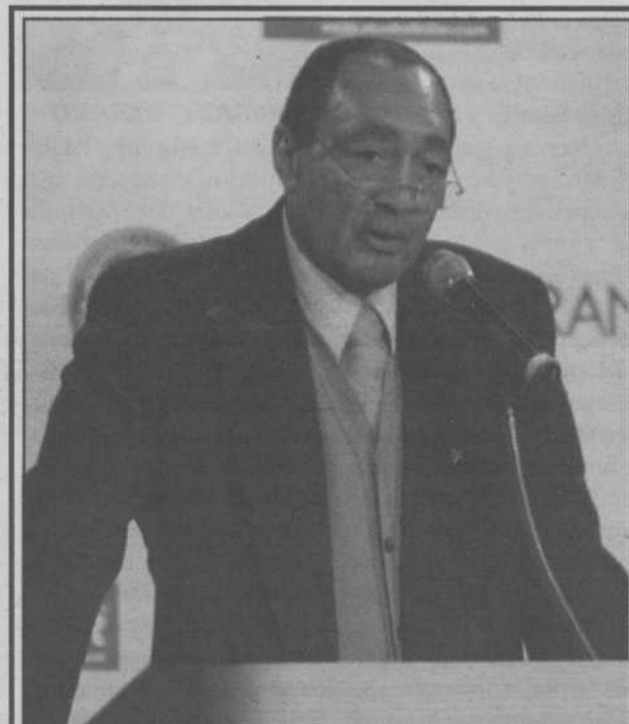
There won't be any awkward Chris Brown moment at the Kids' Choice Awards — the embattled pop star has withdrawn his name from the ballot. Brown had been nominated for favorite male singer and favorite song for "Kiss Kiss" at the March 28 awards show on Nickelodeon. The nominations came shortly before his arrest for allegedly attacking girlfriend and fellow pop star Rihanna. A petition had been circulated to take his name off the ballot, but Nickelodeon said he was still on. However, Brown has decided to take his name out of consideration. In a statement, his representatives said while Brown would like to speak directly to his fans, he can't because of his criminal case. He thanked his fans for their support.

## Coolio charged with cocaine possession, battery

Prosecutors in Los Angeles say Coolio has been charged with cocaine possession. The 45-year-old rapper, whose real name is Artis Leon Ivey, was also charged Tuesday with battery stemming from his Friday arrest at Los Angeles International Airport. Authorities say he grabbed a screener's arm to prevent a luggage search that turned up the drugs. Ivey was charged with one felony count of possession, and one misdemeanor count each of battery and possession of paraphernalia. He was released on \$10,000 bail and is scheduled for arraignment April 3. A message left for manager Susan Haber was not immediately returned Tuesday. Ivey faces up to three years prison if convicted. The rapper gained fame for his 1995 single "Gangsta's Paradise."



Coolio



## VEGAS' STAR POWER

The Vegas Star Awards is coming to Las Vegas. With a recent announcement by Jon Astor-White, president of the National/Las Vegas Entertainment & Sports Hall of Fame, the awards ceremony is part of the Hall of Fame weekend, which is a three-day event set to highlight and recognize people who helped put Las Vegas on the map. The city is known internationally as the "Entertainment Capital of the World." As such, White wants to honor performers and personalities in film, television, sports and the gaming industry who displayed excellence in their craft and helped burnish Las Vegas' image.



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