

# Eskin shelved by WIP-AM for 30 days

*The suspension is part of the settlement of a lawsuit brought by a lawyer for Allen Iverson.*

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Howard Eskin, the afternoon drive-time host on sports talk-radio station WIP-AM (610), has been suspended for 30 days to settle a defamation lawsuit brought by Richard Sprague, a lawyer for 76ers star Allen Iverson.

In addition, Infinity Broadcasting, owner of WIP, has agreed to pay what lawyers called "substantial compensation" as part of the settlement.

Sprague represented Iverson in 2002, when Iverson was charged with entering an apartment in West Philadelphia, carrying a gun, while looking for his wife. All charges against Iverson were eventually dismissed.

On the air for several days that summer, Eskin accused Sprague of attempting to interfere with the case. Eskin said that Sprague might have paid a witness to change his story and claimed that Sprague intentionally spread a false rumor that another witness had failed a lie-detector test.

Neither of those assertions was true, nor were they checked for factual accuracy at the time or based on credible sources, according to all parties in the settlement.

Eskin's suspension is for 30 working days. Marc Rayfield, WIP vice president and general manager, would not comment on specifics yesterday other than to say Eskin would return to the air on Oct. 14. Glen Macnow was the host yesterday in Eskin's usual time slot.

As part of the settlement, WIP yesterday began running recorded statements of apology by Eskin and Rayfield. The statements will play eight times over four days (yesterday, today, tomorrow and Monday), about 3 and 5 p.m.

"I apologize to Mr. Sprague and his family for making false statements that disparaged his reputation," Eskin's recorded apology states, in part. "I apologize to my audience for making such statements about a preeminent member of our community. I also apologize for not correcting the record for over two years, and, instead doing so only after Mr. Sprague sued me."

Attempts to reach Eskin for comment yesterday were not successful.

Sprague filed the defamation lawsuit in the summer of 2003 seeking compensatory damages "in excess of fifty thousand dollars... exclusive of interest and costs, and punitive damages in an amount to punish the defendants for their outrageous conduct and deter them from the commission of like acts in the future."

Neither side disclosed financial terms of the settlement.

The Sprague lawsuit quoted Eskin as making comments on the air including: "[Witness Hakim Carey] was supposed to see the prosecutor on Friday, to just go over what his statement was to the police and, you know, when they were investigating everything. He never showed up and the word was he went to talk to Richard Sprague... . Would that be witness tampering? Is there any kind of witness tampering that Richard Sprague could be charged with when one of the witnesses that's going to testify against his client now goes to see the guy he's going to testify, technically testify against? So, I'm just speculating now, that this Hakim Carey will be happy walking away with \$10,000. I'm just speculating... they got the witness to flip-flop and... somehow they got to him."

The WIP suspension will not affect Eskin's part-time work on WCAU-TV (Channel 10), said Eva Blackwell, a spokeswoman for the channel.

"We still have him scheduled to work Sunday," she said.

Eskin, who has been at WIP since 1986, has been down this road before. In 2000, the Miss America Pageant sued him in federal court after he alleged on the air that the contest was fixed. The suit was settled, and Eskin apologized.

Late last year, he was sued for defamation for comments he made on Channel 10 about former Temple basketball assistant coach and player Nate Blackwell, suggesting Blackwell was "involved in a theft problem last year in the team's locker room," and that Temple was "covering this up," according to a transcript quoted in the suit. That suit remains pending.

He has been suspended at least twice before at the radio station for arguments with colleagues, according to previous reports.