

Commentary

# Artest may have been saved by new rules

Glenn Minnis

**R**on Artest's perch from his shrink's sofa should have just become a little bit more comfortable.

Earlier this month the NBA formally instituted its fans' code of conduct decree and all of a sudden the brooding, malcontent Indiana Pacers forward doesn't seem quite as crazy as everyone made him out to be just three short months ago.

Among its tenets are stipulations outlawing the sale of alcohol beyond the end of the third quarter, the placement of uniformed security officers throughout all league arenas and rules governing disruptive behavior that place restrictions on foul or abusive language or making obscene gestures directed at players. Fighting, throwing objects or attempting to enter the court can lead to ejection and even banishment.

Is it all enough to have saved the volatile Artest from himself on the night of Nov. 19, in Detroit? Could it have stopped him from charging into the stands and setting off one of the wildest, most pathetic scenes in sports history?

One never knows, but this much is certain: the NBA's new commandments clearly serve as a small measure of vindication for him. Vindication in that, finally, someone else is publicly willing to admit that Ron Artest wasn't the only one who snapped that night. That he wasn't the only one who broke all the laws of etiquette.

Sports fans in general and basketball fans in particular never seem to tire of bashing today's athlete over the foul behavior they far too often exhibit, only to arrive at the stadium themselves more than ready to match the ac-

tions of the rudest and surliest of them all in the name of supporting their team.

Put yourself in Artest's shoes for just a moment. Who among us would be willing to accept treatment of any kind from our boss, simply because he is the guy that pays our salary? After all, that's what we, the fans, are in the case of Artest. Who among us would stand by and let others attack us, just because we did something that made them upset?

Those are pretty much the questions Artest was faced with that dreadful night. And with only a few, fast dwindling seconds to contemplate his answer.

Sure Artest broke the cardinal rule of gamesmanship by rushing his tormentor and attempting to rearrange his face. But the other reality remains: respectful, responsible behavior is a two-sided coin. And you can't expect to be able to demand that someone honor sportsmanship on one side of the ledger, only to completely ignore the worth of it on the other.

And so now, with the rules in place and Artest in therapy, speculation has centered around if, in fact, we've seen the last of the NBA bad boy this season. The smart money says Artest would be wise to concentrate on himself and pull it all together before he starts to worry about playing the role of savior for his team.

That fight would, indeed, seem to be best saved for another day. But then, who's going to fight in or with today's NBA?

*Glenn Minnis has written for ESPN The Magazine, Source Sports Magazine and the Chicago Tribune. He has covered the NBA for Inside Stuff Magazine and BET.com*

# Wizards 101, Rockets 98 Hughes scores 31 in return, propels Wizards over Rockets

BY JOSEPH WHITE  
Associated Press



Nick Wass/AP

Washington Wizards guard Gilbert Arenas (0) soars past David Wesley, right, of the Houston Rockets during the Wizards' 101-98 win Wednesday in Washington. Arenas led the Wizards with 33 points.

WASHINGTON - Larry Hughes made an emphatic and timely return to the Wizards on Wednesday, scoring 31 points in his first game since breaking his thumb to help lead Washington to a 101-98 victory over the Houston Rockets.

Hughes made 11 of 20 shots and had six rebounds and four assists, and backcourt partner Gilbert Arenas had 33 points, eight rebounds and five assists for the Wizards, who had lost two straight and five of six. The Wizards have an eight-game winning streak when Hughes is in the lineup, but the previous seven came before he was sidelined after a victory over Phoenix on Jan. 15.

The Wizards blew a 17-point third-quarter lead but rallied from an eight-point fourth quarter deficit. Hughes' 3-pointer gave Washington the lead for good with 3:16 remaining, part of a 18-2 run in which Hughes and Arenas combined for 11.

Brendan Haywood scored six of his 12 points in the final two minutes, including a short turnaround fadeaway jumper over Yao Ming to put the Wizards ahead 99-95 with 50 seconds left. Tracy McGrady made a 3-pointer for the last of his 26 points with seven seconds remaining, but Arenas made two free throws with six seconds to play to put the Wizards up by three. McGrady, guarded by Hughes, missed a 3-pointer that could have tied the game at the buzzer.

# Bryant, accuser settle assault case

BY JON SANCHE  
Associated Press

DENVER - Kobe Bryant and the 20-year-old woman who accused him of rape nearly two years ago settled her civil lawsuit against him Wednesday, ending a sordid case that tarnished one of the NBA's brightest young stars.

Terms were not released. A statement faxed to The Associated Press by Bryant's attorneys said only that the matter had been resolved "to the satisfaction of both parties."

"The parties and their attorneys have agreed that no further comments about the matter can or will be made," the statement said. A motion for dismissal stipulating that the case can never be refiled was filed simultaneously in Denver federal court.

Bryant was in Boston for a game against the Celtics and was unavailable for comment before the game. Los Angeles Lakers spokeswoman Allison Bogli said before the game Bryant would not comment on the settlement.

The agreement probably spells out financial penalties for revealing

any details, said Steve Cron, a Los Angeles attorney familiar with celebrity cases.

"It's in both parties' interests to have this remain confidential," he said. "That's one of the incentives for them to settle: He didn't have to do a deposition, the lurid details wouldn't be posted on some Web site. She didn't have to face the rigors of having a deposition by his lawyers and she'll gain some privacy as well."

The lawsuit, filed three weeks before the criminal case against the NBA star collapsed last summer, sought unspecified damages for mental injuries, public scorn and humiliation the woman said she has suffered since their June 2003 encounter at the Vail-area hotel where she worked. The woman, now pregnant and married, has not commented publicly on the case.

Bryant, a 27-year-old married father of one, has apologized for his "behavior that night and for the consequences she has suffered," but has insisted the sex was consensual. He has never been questioned under oath about what happened in his hotel room the night.



Ted S. Warren/AP

Attorneys for NBA star Kobe Bryant and the woman accusing him of rape say her civil lawsuit has been settled "to the satisfaction of both parties."



Ann Helsen/AP

New rules instituted by the NBA have dealt with the aftermath of the fight between players, such as Indiana's Ron Artest, and fans last year.