

February 16, 2008

In the Case of the Model vs. the Boxer, a Court Showdown That Wasn't

By ALAN FEUER

This one you couldn't miss. The press release was just too good.

"Media Alert***Media Alert*** Media Alert," it read. "Oscar De La Hoya Reunites With Ex-Mistress in Federal Court Over Sexy Lingerie Photos."

Which is to say, not your average Friday in Manhattan at the Southern District of New York.

Some hearings are about the law; some are about the facts. But Friday's hearing, at which Mr. De La Hoya, the boxer, was due in court for his reunion, was simply about the show.

The ex-mistress, Milana Dravnel, appeared outside the courthouse, surrounded by the various mutts and rats who carry pads and cameras in New York. Her patent leather handbag matched her boots.

"I've been hurt by Oscar," she told the gathered press. "This is my only option. I just want to move on with a positive outcome."

Her lawyer, Salvatore Strazzullo, spelled his name for the television cameras. His watchband matched his topcoat.

"How you doin', guys?" he inquired of the reporters. "We just want the truth to come out. We just want to restore the reputation, the integrity, of my client."

His client — a model and a former striptease dancer once employed by the nightclub Scores — filed a \$25 million lawsuit against Mr. De La Hoya in November. The suit accuses him of fraud, defamation and the infliction of emotional distress, charging that he forced Ms. Dravnel to recant a story that she told last year on the television program "Entertainment Tonight."

That story concerned some photographs said to have been taken of Mr. De La Hoya one night last May at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Philadelphia. They showed Mr. De La Hoya, a 35-year-old welterweight, dressed in fishnets and a tutu. The pictures, as they sometimes do, found their way onto the Internet. Mr. De La Hoya argued that they were altered. After going on TV to say that they were real, Ms. Dravnel then told The Daily News that they were not.

Now she claims that one of Mr. De La Hoya's lawyers coerced her into signing an agreement to change her mind — an accusation that his current lawyers say is false. Since recanting, her lawsuit says, she has suffered "severe levels of stress, anxiety and depression."

Ms. Dravnel, 22, arrived outside the courthouse shortly after 3. She was dressed in black except for her pearl silk blouse. Her voice was soft, with a gentle Russian purr. She told the microphones that she had not been a stripper for at least a year and a half and in fact was trying "something else." Mr. Strazzullo played the role of her protector. "He called her a liar, a fake, 'just a stripper,'" he said of Mr. De La Hoya. "Well, a stripper, maybe, but at a place he frequented many times."

Inside the courthouse, the action was somewhat less active. Mr. De La Hoya had decided not to appear. When Ms. Dravnel was told of this, she turned around and left. The whole point, Mr. Strazzullo said, had been to see the man in court.

That left a hearing to be held with neither a defendant nor a plaintiff. The judge came in, set a schedule for motions, then stood and left.

Judd Burstein, Mr. De La Hoya's lawyer, wandered over to a passel of reporters.

"So was it really worth the trip?" he asked. "I think the real story is that all of you" — and here he used a vulgar Yiddish word — "actually showed up."

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