

Eskin wasn't a genius on this one

WIP host loses big time in libel suit filed by Sprague

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HERE'S A stone-cold mortal lock.

Howard Eskin won't be back on WIP (610-AM) until Oct. 14.

Because rather than call Eskin a "moron" or a "dope" as the sports-talk host does to his radio listeners, Richard Sprague decided last year to sue him.

And the move worked.

Eskin will be suspended for 30 days, beginning yesterday, as part of a settlement reached in a libel suit by Sprague filed July 2003 in Common Pleas Court.

Sprague's suit came after on-air comments by Eskin in 2002 suggesting that while Sprague represented Allen Iverson on weapons charges (which were later dropped), the attorney paid one witness to lie in court, and spread falsehoods about another to challenge his credibility.

In addition to the suspension, Sprague will receive "substantial compensation," according to his lawyers, and on-air apologies from Eskin and WIP Vice President Marc Rayfield that will be aired a total of eight times during Eskin's time slot.

It is not known how much if any of Sprague's cash award will be paid by Eskin, 53, and how much by WIP or the station's owner, Infinity Broadcasting.

As most radio stations do, WIP has libel insurance, a station source confirmed yesterday. All sides in the matter yesterday declined to discuss the settlement amount.

The first apologies aired yesterday during a commercial break in Eskin's 3 - 7 p.m. show. Glen Macnow covered the show yesterday and will also do so today.

Eskin's apology and that of Rayfield, who did not work for the station when the suit-inspiring comments were made, will be repeated this afternoon and also on Monday and Tuesday.

"I am very pleased with the settlement," Sprague told us yesterday.

He also praised his attorneys, Shanin Specter and Tom Kline.

Asked if Eskin's apology meant more to him than a cash award to an already rich man, Sprague said it's the entire settlement that satisfies him.

Reached last night, Eskin said "This is a legal matter. I am pleased that a settlement has been reached, and other than that I have no further comment."

In September 2000, Eskin was sued by the Miss America Pageant after saying the contest was fixed. The matter was settled out of court, and Eskin apologized for his remarks.

Last year, Eskin, a former Daily News columnist, was sued by former Temple basketball assistant coach Nate Blackwell over comments made on NBC-10, where Eskin works part-time.

Eskin said Blackwell, who was suspended by Temple, had been involved in a theft problem in the team locker room.

An NBC-10 spokeswoman yesterday declined comment on the status of that case.

Some highlights of Eskin's depositions in the Sprague case:

- While being interrogated on where he gets his news, Specter asks him about his readership of the Daily News. Eskin says he reads it every day, and also offers correct answers when asked if the Daily News publishes a Saturday edition (yes) and a Sunday edition (no).
- Eskin is challenged at length over a July 2003 claim that most attorneys are "the scum of the earth." Specter asks Eskin whether his four attorneys, present in the deposition room, were in fact, scum of the earth.
"No, I think they're terrific."
- Being questioned by Specter:
"In your opinion, Mr. Eskin, is there a better reporter in Philadelphia than you?"
"There may be."
"Who?"
"I don't know of any."
"Any more resourceful, in your opinion, than you?"
"There may be a newspaper person."
(Thanks, Howard.)