

Oakley files civil suit against Knicks owner, MSG

September 12, 2017 11:54 AM By Jim Baumbach jim.baumbach@newsday.com

newsday.com

Charles Oakley filed a civil lawsuit against James Dolan, Madison Square Garden and MSG Networks on Tuesday, seeking unspecified damages related to the former Knicks player's scuffle with Garden security during a game last February.

The lawsuit, filed in Brooklyn federal court and obtained by Newsday, accuses Dolan and the Garden of defamatory, libelous and slanderous comments directed at Oakley following the incident that led police to arrest Oakley.

The lawsuit also accuses Garden security of assault, battery and false imprisonment as a result of guards forcibly removing Oakley from his seat a few rows behind Dolan, the Knicks owner, during the Feb. 8 game against the Los Angeles Clippers.

Oakley, 53, was charged with misdemeanor assault as a result of the melee. He appeared in Manhattan criminal court last month and accepted a plea deal that allows for the charges to be dropped if he remains out of trouble for six months.

He also was banned from the Garden for a year.

Douglas Wigdor, Oakley's attorney, said Oakley filed the lawsuit "out of principle and his desire to hold Mr. Dolan accountable for his actions, which I can assure you that our firm is committed to doing on his behalf."

A Garden spokesman did not immediately respond to the lawsuit.

Oakley, a fan favorite who played for the Knicks from 1988-98, engaged in a public war of words with Dolan in the days after the incident. Oakley's lawsuit says the public response by Dolan and the Garden represented "a smear campaign in a further attempt to ruin his reputation."

The lawsuit cites a tweet from the Knicks' official public relations Twitter account that said, "we hope he gets some help soon" as well as comments made by Dolan on ESPN Radio.

"To me, Charles has got a problem," Dolan said on the radio after the incident. "We've said it before; he's his own worst problem. People have to understand that. He has a problem with anger. He's both physically and verbally abusive. He may have a problem with alcohol."

Oakley's lawsuit contends those statements are false, saying the former Knick has "never had a problem with excessive anger nor has he ever abused alcohol or any other drug."

Oakley's lawsuit also says he does not know when his feud with the Knicks owner began.

According to the court filing, Dolan "constantly disrespected" Oakley by "refusing to make eye contact or shake his hand during meetings, denying him the type of fan appreciation nights given to much less popular and successful members of the Knicks, and even making him purchase his own tickets to attend games at the arena he called home for a decade."

Following the incident NBA commissioner Adam Silver brought Oakley and Dolan together to his Manhattan office and had Oakley's friend Michael Jordan on conference call in an attempt to calm nerves. Silver released a statement saying both men were apologetic. But Oakley said later that he told them, "I'd

rather go to jail than them saying they did something for me.”

Copyright © 2017 Newsday. All rights reserved.