

COURTS AND CRIME

A\$AP ROCKY GETS OCTOBER TRIAL DATE FOR ALLEGED SHOOTING OF A\$AP RELLI

The rapper has pleaded not guilty to two counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm

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A\$AP Rocky is due to face a jury trial this fall over charges **he opened fire** on his former friend A\$AP Relli on a Los Angeles street corner more than two years ago, a judge ruled Thursday.

The “Praise The Lord” rapper received a trial date of October 21, 2024 at a morning hearing attended by one of his defense lawyers, Sara Caplan. The judge said Rocky, whose legal name is Rakim Mayers, must file his planned motion to dismiss the case by July 19. Caplan said she was still waiting for medical records related to an alleged hospital visit by Relli.

Mayers, 35, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm. At a preliminary hearing last November, prosecutors **showed video of the alleged gun assault**, claiming Mayers fired a weapon at the corner of Selma Ave. and Vista Del Mar Ave. in Hollywood on November 6, 2021 after first confronting Relli, born Terrell Ephron, near a parking garage about a block away.

Footage from the parking garage captured the start of the altercation, prosecutors said, with Mayers and Ephron involved in a physical struggle. Separate grainy video shot by a building security system a block away showed the moment Mayers allegedly discharged the weapon and grazed Relli's hand, prosecutors said. That video was difficult to make out because it was captured from across a parking lot. There is no obvious muzzle flash and no sound, only figures appearing to scatter at the same time. Surveillance clips recovered from separate nearby buildings captured the sound of alleged gunfire and then a man identified by prosecutors as Mayers rounding a corner and slowing down to a walk.

An LAPD detective testified last November that the video from the parking garage on Argyle Ave. across from the W Hotel appeared to show Mayers with a gun in his hands. Under cross examination, Det. Frank Flores conceded that no weapons were ever recovered in the case. The detective also acknowledged the video of the alleged shooting was inconclusive. "(There's) nothing clear that shows it," Flores testified, referring to the purported shooting. The detective tried to add that "collectively," the videos tell a plausible story, but Mayer's defense lawyer Joe Tacopina shut him down. "I'm not asking for opinion," Tacopina interrupted, asking again if the video showed a shooting. "Nothing definitively shows," the detective answered.

"The court agrees with the defense that you don't see an actual shooting on the video. Later, in another section of video, you do hear two shots," Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge M.L. Villar said last November as she sent the case to trial. Judge Villar said she agreed with prosecutors that "tempers were heightened on both sides" during the incident. In addition to video, the judge said she considered **the extensive testimony by Relli** regarding the alleged shooting and his belief he was grazed by a bullet on his left hand. "In any event, Mr. Ephron

does what appears to be a dance around the other individuals to avoid being shot. His testimony is that he was shot,” Judge Villar said.

Tacopina — a bulldog defense lawyer known for representing high-profile clients including Meek Mill, YG, and Donald Trump — said after the November hearing that Mayers would be “vindicated” at trial. Speaking to reporters, he suggested Relli perjured himself when he denied asking for millions of dollars to make the criminal case disappear.

“He swore under oath (that) no, he did not. That’s not going to bode well for him at trial,” Tacopina said of Ephron. The lawyer said it was possible Mayers might testify in his own defense. “Common sense is going to prevail and we’re going to get [Mayers] through this, and he’s going to be vindicated,” Tacopina said. “The evidence we have that they don’t know about is going to be devastating — devastating.”

In his full day of testimony last November, Ephron claimed he was the victim of an armed ambush orchestrated by the Grammy-nominated rapper. Ephron said he sent Mayers an embittered text on Oct. 28, 2021, because he believed Mayers had become “big-headed” and failed to deliver on a promise to pay funeral expenses for one of their friends. “You so fucking fake it’s sad,” the text shown on a screen in court read. Mayers never responded, he testified. (Under cross-examination, Ephron said he eventually learned Mayers paid for the entire funeral.)

“Don’t ever forget who introduced you to this life,” Ephron wrote in another text. He told the court he was the one who brought Mayers into the A\$AP fold when they were high school students in New York.

After his texts went unanswered, Ephron said he was riding in a car with A\$AP Bari, whose real name is Jabari Shelton, when he purportedly overheard Mayers talking about him on a phone call. “He said he’d beat me up, that I’m emotional,” Ephron testified. According to Ephron, Mayers finally reached out to him directly the evening of Nov. 6, 2021, with calls and texts asking where Ephron was staying during a trip to Los Angeles. They agreed to talk face to face, setting the stage for the alleged shooting, he testified.

Ephron testified that Mayers pulled out a firearm during their initial confrontation at the parking garage and threatened, “I’ll kill you right now.” Ephron said he dared Mayers to shoot him. “Shoot that shit. Why you brought a gun if you’re not going to use it? You don’t scare me,” he allegedly told Mayers. Ephron testified that people were walking nearby, outside the hotel, so Mayers allegedly put the gun in his waistband and started to walk away.

“I was talking a bunch of shit,” Ephron said. “I wasn’t doing anything physically. I was just so mad. It didn’t sit well with me, and I wanted him to hear my side. I knew I was never going to see this man again,” Ephron testified. He claimed Mayers eventually turned around and fired an initial shot that “grazed” his left hand. He said Mayers fired two or three more times before fleeing the scene. He said he returned later that night and found two 9mm shell casings that he photographed and gave to police.

Mayers, the boyfriend of **Rihanna** who shares two children with the superstar singer, is also fighting a lawsuit brought by Ephron alleging assault, battery, negligence, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. As first **reported by *Rolling Stone***, the civil complaint filed in August 2022 unmasked Ephron as the alleged victim in the shooting investigation that led to **Mayers’ arrest in April 2022.**

Tacopina previously told *Rolling Stone* that his client didn’t shoot anyone and was the victim of a failed shakedown. “Rocky didn’t shoot him by any stretch,” Tacopina said, calling the assault allegation a “false scenario” at the heart of “a plain and blatant classic attempt at extortion.” The lawyer said Ephron had been badgering Mayers for money and initiated a physical altercation at the face-to-face meeting.

“He’s a failed associate — ex-associate — of Rocky’s, and he’s jealous,” Tacopina said of Ephron. “He was trying to get money from Rocky. He wanted Rocky to support him. He made it clear. There were repeated attempts where he tried to ask for money in lieu of not causing problems for Rocky. That’s what he said. We have all this memorialized in text messages and otherwise, so it’s an extortion.”

Ephron's former civil lawyers Jamal Tooson and Brian Hurwitz previously told *Rolling Stone* that the "merits" of the case against Mayers were "thoroughly investigated by both law enforcement and the Los Angeles District Attorney prior to the decision to not only arrest A\$AP Rocky but charge him." Ephron's new lawyer on the civil case is Camille Vasquez, the attorney who represented Johnny Depp in his **defamation trial against ex-wife Amber Heard**. Vasquez and Ephron filed a **second civil complaint against Mayers**, alleging he and Tacopina defamed Ephron with the extortion allegation.