

Rolling Stone

'CONFIDENT'

A\$AP ROCKY GUN-ASSAULT TRIAL TO BEGIN NEXT WEEK: 'HE'S READY TO GO'

"He's eager to tell his story. He would love the opportunity to do so," rapper's lawyer Joe Tacopina tells *Rolling Stone* while cautioning no decisions have been made about defense testimony

By NANCY DILLON

JANUARY 15, 2025



With the aftermath of the Los Angeles wildfires as a dramatic backdrop, **A\$AP Rocky's** criminal trial over **charges he fired shots** at his former friend A\$AP Relli on a Hollywood, California, street three years ago is on track to begin next week.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Mark S. Arnold said jury selection will begin Tuesday with Rocky, born Rakim Mayers, ordered to appear in person. Prosecutors said they plan to make a new plea-deal offer to Mayers before then. But the Grammy-nominated rapper's high-powered defense lawyer, Joseph Tacopina, told Judge Arnold he doesn't believe his client is interested.

"My client has indicated he's not willing to take anything, but I will listen to any offer," Tacopina told the court. After the hearing, Tacopina said Mayers is feeling "confident" he will be acquitted and is ready to testify if necessary.

"He's eager to tell his story. He would love the opportunity to do so," Tacopina tells *Rolling Stone*. "He's a good human being, and that would come out if he testifies. But that's a decision that has not been made yet. It depends how the case goes."

Mayers, 36, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm. If convicted as charged, he faces up to 24 years in prison. At a preliminary hearing in late 2023, prosecutors **showed video of the alleged Nov. 6, 2021 gun assault**, claiming Mayers fired a weapon at the corner of Selma Avenue and Vista Del Mar Avenue in Hollywood after first confronting Relli, born Terrell Ephron, at the entrance of a parking garage about a block away.

Surveillance footage from the parking garage captured the start of the altercation and showed Mayers and Ephron involved in a physical struggle. According to prosecutors, separate grainy video shot by a different building's security system a block away shows the moment Mayers allegedly discharged a weapon. The video is difficult to make out, a police witness acknowledged. There is no obvious muzzle flash and no sound, only figures appearing to scatter at the same time. Surveillance clips recovered from other nearby buildings captured loud noises and then a man identified by prosecutors as Mayers rounding a corner and slowing down to a walk. Prosecutors claim the loud cracks were the alleged shots.

Tacopina told reporters Wednesday that he believes the evidence is on his side. “There’s a reason that 10 police officers searched and didn’t find shell casings there,” he said. “[It’s] not because they were blind or drunk or because they didn’t want to find it. It’s because they did a thorough job.”

The pit bull defense lawyer known for representing high-profile clients including Meek Mill, YG, and Donald Trump, said Mayers is “confident and he’s ready to go. He believes in justice, and he believes this is going to work out for him.” He called the case against Mayers “fundamentally weak” and his defense position “very, very strong.”

Tacopina also acknowledged his client has a lot on the line and is thinking about his family. He said any decision about Mayers’ superstar partner **Rihanna**, the mother of his two young children, attending the trial would be up to them. “I know Rocky is very protective of Rihanna and doesn’t want her anywhere near this proceeding. But that’s a family decision they’ll make,” he said.

During the Wednesday hearing, prosecutors balked at the suggestion Rihanna might be referred to as Mayers’ “wife” in front of jurors. The judge said that unless the couple is married in some jurisdiction in the world, she’ll be referred to as his “significant other.”

“This case is not about Rihanna. But I guess the DA wants to make sure people aren’t so enamored with Rihanna they’re going to be so blinded by their love for Rihanna they won’t listen to the evidence and facts of this case,” Tacopina said outside the courthouse. “I think people are too smart for that. But I guess they’re worried about it. They want to make sure she’s classified in [a certain] way.”

Mayers also has a full professional schedule heading into trial. He was tapped as a headline performer for **Rolling Loud California** in Los Angeles in March and named as a **co-chair of the next Met Gala**, set for May 5, with Pharrell Williams and LeBron James. **He’s also due to play the “main role”** in Spike Lee’s upcoming remake of Akira Kurosawa’s 1963 kidnapping drama *High and Low*, making his acting debut alongside Ice Spice.

While Deputy District Attorney Paul Przelomiec has been prosecuting the case since its inception, Deputy District Attorney John Lewin, the lead prosecutor on the Robert Durst murder trial and a vocal supporter of new District Attorney Nathan Hochman, appeared at the hearing Wednesday and said he was joining the team.

At the evidentiary hearing in November 2023, LAPD Detective Frank Flores testified that no weapons were ever recovered in the case. The detective also conceded the video of the alleged shooting was inconclusive. “[There’s] nothing clear that shows it,” meaning the purported gunfire, he said. The detective claimed that “collectively,” the videos tell a plausible story, but Tacopina pushed back. “I’m not asking for opinion,” Tacopina interrupted, asking again if the video showed a shooting. “Nothing definitively shows,” the detective answered.

The judge in the hearing ruled there was enough evidence to warrant a jury trial. “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. In addition to the video evidence, 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.

In his preliminary testimony, Ephron claimed he was the victim of an armed ambush orchestrated by Mayers. He described sending Mayers an embittered text on Oct. 28, 2021, days before the alleged shooting, because he believed Mayers had failed to deliver on a promise to pay funeral expenses for one of their friends, A\$AP Josh. “You so fucking fake it’s sad,” the text shown to the judge read. Mayers never responded, Ephron testified. (Under cross-examination, Ephron said he eventually learned Mayers paid for the entire funeral.)

According to Ephron, Mayers reached out to him directly the night of the alleged assault and set up the face-to-face meeting. He testified that Mayers

brandished a firearm outside the parking garage and threatened, “I’ll kill you right now.” Ephron said he dared Mayers to follow through, and that Mayers eventually fired an initial shot that “grazed” his hand about a block away. “Rocky turned around and shot me,” he testified under oath. 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 days later.

Mayers also is 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 revealed Ephron as the alleged victim in the shooting investigation that led to **Mayers’ arrest in April 2022**. In court, Tacopina has claimed Ephron and his lawyers sought a financial settlement after it was clear a criminal case was pending.

“I think this is in large part about money, money, money. And there’s jealousy, obviously. He’s made that clear,” Tacopina told reporters Wednesday, after the hearing. “If he got money, we wouldn’t all be sitting here right now.”

Ephron’s former civil lawyers, Jamal Tooson and Brian Hurwitz, previously told *Rolling Stone* that the case against Mayers was “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, Camille Vasquez, is the attorney who represented Johnny Depp in his **defamation trial against ex-wife Amber Heard**. Vasquez did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday. Ephron went on to file a **second civil complaint against Mayers** that alleges he and Tacopina defamed Ephron with the extortion allegation.