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Snipes acquitted of tax fraud, conspiracy



Attorney defends Snipes 1:07

Actor Wesley Snipes' attorney defends his client's reputation after he was convicted of failing to file tax returns.

(CNN) -- Actor Wesley Snipes was found guilty Friday on three misdemeanor charges of failing to file tax returns -- but jurors cleared him of more serious felony charges of tax fraud and conspiracy.

Snipes could have faced up to five years in prison on both the conspiracy and fraud charges. He was found guilty of only half -- three out of six -- of the failure to file charges. He faces a maximum one-year sentence on each but can be expected to be sentenced to less.

"Our position has been all along that Mr. Snipes committed no fraud," said Robert Bernhoft, Snipes' attorney, after the verdict was read Friday afternoon. "He had no bad intent, and that's what the jury accepted."

Snipes, dressed in a black suit, smiled and thanked well-wishers outside the courthouse -- walking with his hands held in a prayer position. He did not make a statement or take questions from the media. Watch the media crush after the verdict »

Almost immediately, agents of the Internal Revenue Service made it clear that they still intend to pursue taxes Snipes owes on roughly \$38 million in income.

"Ultimately, if he really wants to take this all the way, he can go to tax court," said Victor Lessoff, a special agent with the IRS. "But we will pursue, civilly, the taxes. That's very important to us."

Bernhoft suggested Snipes will try to take care of the payments.

"Mr. Snipes has always been committed to doing the right thing and after this trial is over, he'll make whatever amends are required," he said.

Snipes, who starred in such movies as "New Jack City," "White Men Can't Jump" and the "Blade" series of action films, had pleaded not guilty to charges that he failed to pay his federal income taxes from 1999 through 2004.

In October 2006, Justice Department and IRS officials issued an arrest warrant for Snipes that charged him with conspiring to defraud the Internal Revenue Service and presenting a fraudulent claim for payment to the IRS.

Snipes was charged in Florida because he lived in Windermere in Orange County, Florida, during the years covered by the indictment.

Two other men -- Eddie Ray Kahn and Douglas Rosile -- were charged along with Snipes. Kahn was described in the indictment as the founder of what he billed as a Christian group but allegedly was a "for-profit commercial enterprise that promoted and sold fraudulent tax schemes that interfered with the administration of the internal revenue laws of the United States."

Rosile is described as a former certified public accountant who continued to do accounting work after his license had expired.

According to the indictment, the men claim the IRS is entitled only to income derived from foreign-based activities.

Kahn and Rosile were found guilty on fraud and conspiracy charges.

Lessoff, of the IRS, said Kahn's group is believed to have as many as 4,000 members.

"This was a very high-profile case with us and we're satisfied with the result because it clearly shows you cannot get away with not paying taxes," Lessoff said. "If you are part of this organization, if you're one of them, you need to get in touch with us and make right with us." Watch the IRS agent urge others to come forward »

Snipes will be sentenced at a later date.