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News

Former Royal Oak arena manager pleads no contest to disorderly conduct

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By Catherine Kavanaugh
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Judge dismisses charge of aggravated indecent exposure.

PONTIAC — The former manager of the Royal Oak ice arena pleaded no contest Tuesday to reduced charges of disorderly conduct just before he was scheduled to go on trial for aggravated indecent exposure.

Ron Holbrook, 52, of West Bloomfield originally was charged with one count of the high misdemeanor after a female employee of the Lindell Ice Arena told police he masturbated in his office with the door open.

However, the charge was dismissed Tuesday by

Oakland County Circuit Judge Nanci Grant just before a jury was to be seated. The judge granted motions to add two counts of disorderly conduct against Holbrook.

The defendant's pleas of no contest means he doesn't admit or refute the charges. While technically not a guilty plea, it carries the same weight at sentencing time but can't be used against the accused in any civil lawsuit for the same act.

Holbrook is scheduled to be sentenced on Dec. 2. The maximum penalty for disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor, is 90 days in jail, a \$500 fine, or both.

The original charge carried a maximum penalty of two years in prison.

Defense attorney Cameron Miller said his client had a tough choice to make Tuesday and decided to plead to the lesser charges rather than risk a jury verdict against him.

"Ron maintains his innocence," Miller said. "We felt we had a strong defense but given the uncertainties of trial this was the safest route to go. A number of people came forward to help Ron. They were disappointed the police didn't talk to them."

Miller said he subpoenaed five witnesses who were at the Lindell Ice Arena, 1403 Lexington Boulevard, at the time of the April 13 incident.

"There were a half-dozen skaters and pros on the ice," Miller said. "They told us they didn't see or hear anything from the

witness. Her demeanor was the same as always. They were shocked about the charge. They said there's no way this could have happened."

Holbrook's door only opened 90 degrees before it hit the floor and his office could only be seen from a corner of the ice rink where the skaters practice their jumps, Miller said.

Because Holbrook was a city employee, the case was investigated by the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. Sheriff's investigators said the victim was upset after allegedly seeing Holbrook masturbate while watching women skate on the ice.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's Office recommended the dismissed count be replaced with two charges of disorderly conduct.

"I believe they wanted to ensure he would have this on his record," Miller said. "If it was one count his record could be expunged after five years."

Royal Oak fired Holbrook soon after he was accused of aggravated indecent exposure. He had been a city employee for 14 years and was earning \$159,000 in salary and benefits.

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