

The Indianapolis Star

April 3, 1997

Testifying at O.J. Simpson's civil trial turned Hoosier expert on celebrities into a celebrity in his own right.



EXPERT: Mark Roesler, chairman of CMG Worldwide, Inc., sits in his Fishers office. A Johnny Unitas football is nearby.



ON THE SCENE: Mark Roesler arrives at Los Angeles County Superior Court in Santa Monica two weeks ago, during the trial's penalty phase.

Star Witness

By Nelson Price
STAFF WRITER

The experience, he says, has been "surreal." It isn't just that Hoosier businessman Mark Roesler offered key testimony during one of the most sensational civil trials of the 20th century.

It's that Roesler, 41, has enjoyed only fleeting moments of tranquility since then.

In the last two weeks Roesler, the chairman of CMG Worldwide Inc., has appeared on about a dozen national TV programs--from The Today Show to Geraldo Rivera's late-night cable show--and received hundreds of phone calls, faxes and letters many from unex-

pected sources.

They include the widow of the baseball star Roy Campanella, who wrote Roesler to commend his appearance on behalf of the plaintiffs in the second phase of the O. J. Simpson civil trial.

"It's all everyone wants to talk to me about," Roesler, a lanky, soft-spoken man, says at an interview in his partially finished office.

About two months ago CMG Worldwide, one of the country's largest product licensing companies for celebrity images, moved from Indianapolis to a new building in Fishers.

"I was told, 'We're going to need an expert to testify about the value of Simpson's name and likeness.' Then over Christmas, they told me, 'You will be our star witness.'"

-Mark Roesler

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The company represents hundreds of clients affiliated with legendary figures, including the estates of James Dean and Marilyn Monroe (the firm's two most popular images), Malcolm X, Humphrey Bogart, Amelia Earhart and baseball greats Babe Ruth and Campanella.

Saying he endured an "aggressive" cross-examination, Roesler says he feels vindicated by the jury's decision to require Simpson to pay punitive damages of \$25 million to the family of Ronald Goldman and the estate of Nicole Brown Simpson.

During his 3 1/2 hours of testimony - not including a lunch break in the middle of Roesler's court appearance Feb. 6 - the Hoosier analyzed Simpson's earning potential. He estimated it at \$50 million to \$100 million over the rest of Simpson's life, or \$25 million when adjusted for present day values.

"I'm not a professional expert witness," Roesler emphasizes. He's been hired in that capacity only a few times, including work on behalf of the late Ginger Rogers (the dispute was settled out of court) and Hugh Hefner.

His involvement with the Simpson controversy began about a year ago, with a call from attorneys for the Goldman family.

"I was told, 'we're going to need an expert to testify about the value of Simpson's name and likeness,'" Roesler recalls. "Then over Christmas, they told me, 'You will be our star witness.'

"I realized I would be attacked from every conceivable angle by the defense."

Roesler, an attorney at the forefront of the celebrity licensing business for nearly 15 years, says he spent hours assessing Simpson's earning potential by examining court documents about the celebrity's



SPORTS SIGNATURE:

Mark Roesler displays a football autographed by Johnny Unitas. O.J. Simpson's autograph would be worth about \$125.

income flow.

Notoriety means big bucks

To those who assume Simpson's earning power will dwindle because of his notoriety, Roesler says:

"Controversy sells, like it or not. Remember, Simpson is a guy who got a \$1 million contract from the Star, a tabloid magazine, just for posing at a gravesite.

Gasps could be heard in the Santa Monica, Calif., courtroom, he says, when lawyers referred to a report by Roesler that Lee Harvey Oswald's autograph sells for twice as much as the autograph of the president he assassinated, John F. Kennedy. (An Oswald signature fetches \$2,000, compared to \$1,000 for a JFK autograph.

"Like most of these matters, it's more complicated than it seems," Roesler emphasizes. "You have to remember there are far fewer Oswald than Kennedy autographs."

He describes the atmosphere in the courtroom as tense, but generally controlled and dignified.

Although Roesler says he is "absolutely convinced" of Simpson's guilt in the double murders, he never met the

O.J.'s marketability

Like most famous people, O.J. Simpson will have at least seven potential sources of income, says Mark Roesler, a celebrity licensing expert.

Because Simpson is controversial, the sources will be restricted, adds Roesler, chairman of Fishers-based CMG Worldwide. But, he says, the former football hero will enjoy more options than most people realize.

The income sources, as assessed by Roesler:

Autographs and card shows: Before the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, O.J. Simpson earned about \$40 for an autographed football. "The value tripled overnight, to \$125 on a football, and has remained steady ever since," Roesler says.

Books and audiotapes: "Simpson hasn't written about his criminal or civil trials," Roesler said. "He was paid \$1 million for the silly I Want To Tell You book in which he merely responded to letters he received in prison. Obviously, his potential income from books is great."

defendant. During the two days Roesler was in the courtroom, Simpson wasn't.

But the Hoosier says he became thoroughly acquainted with relatives of the late Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson, particularly Goldman's father, Fred.

"He's a compassionate man who's pursuing all of this for the right reasons," Roesler said. "Fred told me at one point, 'Mark, there are 25,000 people a year murdered in this country. Their families are destroyed just like mine. That's what drives me.'"

Representing Elvis a start

Roesler, a native of Alexandria, Ind., is married to Amy SerVaas and began working for her family's Curtis management and publishing operations in the early 1980s.

Media interviews: Roesler noticed that Simpson was paid \$50,000 for a French TV interview.

Endorsements: They will be unavailable in the United States for Simpson, the former spokesman for Hertz rental cars. But Simpson may land endorsements overseas, Roesler says.

"In other countries, people are confused about our system of justice," he explains. "His argument has been, 'Look, I was found not guilty in the criminal case.'"

Licensing of his name and image: Since the murders, Simpson's representatives have initiated legal action against 40 unauthorized products, including t-shirts and medallions, Roesler says.

Sales of personal possessions: Offers will be available for everything from Simpson's sneakers to the suit he wore when the not guilty verdict was announced in his criminal trial.

"Some people are willing to pay deeply for celebrity possessions," Roesler says. "Notoriety doesn't hurt."

Movie residuals and future film opportunities.

Roesler delved into celebrity licensing by acquiring the right to represent the estate of Elvis Presley.

Since then, Roesler has pursued licensing rights for hundreds of famous names and images, from those of former quarterback Johnny Unitas to legendary author Mark Twain. At the new Fisher's office, CMG Worldwide employs 45 people.

Since his involvement in the Simpson controversy, Roesler is frequently asked whether he would want the former football hero as a celebrity client.

Roesler replies that he would decline for several reasons. They go beyond his opinions about Simpson's guilt and moral character.

"Many of my other clients would object," he says.