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NEWS/ Perez Prevails in Ronson Libel Suit

by Natalie Finn

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Freedom of the press, be-yotches!

A Los Angeles judge on Thursday dismissed a defamation lawsuit brought against Perez Hilton by Lindsay Lohan pal Samantha Ronson, accepting the blogger's argument that the suit was "frivolous" and an attack on his right to free speech.

Ruling that Ronson is *at least* a limited public figure, rather than the wronged private figure she portrayed herself as, L.A. Superior Court Judge Elihu M. Berle said that perezhilton.com is a public forum and that Ronson's involvement with Lohan is a matter of public interest.

Ronson voluntarily placed herself in the public eye both through her career as a nightclub and Hollywood party deejay and through her choice of friends, Berle said.

The record spinner/hip-hop singer sued Hilton and Sunset Photo and News Agency exec Jill Ishkanian on July 12, claiming that Ishkanian libeled Ronson by reporting on celebritybabylon.com that Ronson had purposely left cocaine in Lohan's car when the starlet was busted in May for DUI after crashing her Mercedes on Sunset Boulevard.

Celebrity Babylon also said that Ronson had made a monetary deal with the paparazzi to hook them up with the now-notorious shots of Lohan looking completely out of it in a car on the night following her single-car smashup.

Ronson accused Hilton, whose real name is Mario Lavandeira, of brazenly recycling the same info and writing that she was "toxic" to Lohan.

"I never placed cocaine next to Lindsay Lohan in a car," Ronson stated in court documents filed in September. "Everything in the defendants' reports is false."

Ronson may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but the media maelstrom that was Lohan's extra-steep fall from grace took precedence.

"It's a huge victory for not only Perez Hilton but also for everyone who uses the Internet to comment on celebrities of public interest," the celebrity gossip purveyor's attorney, Bryan J. Freedman, told reporters following Thursday's hearing. "We are thrilled this judge ruled the correct way and found the lawsuit to be frivolous."

Freedman said that he planned to file a motion to collect about \$50,000 in attorneys' fees from Ronson's camp.

Ishkanian, meanwhile, reached an undisclosed settlement with Ronson last month.

Hilton was scheduled to be deposed Oct. 19, but Freedman received a letter from Ronson attorney Martin Garbus three days beforehand that said Garbus' firm had been "discharged" in the case. Another letter written Tuesday and included in the latest court filing stated that Ronson had authorized Garbus to negotiate a settlement.

Hilton—who in his own court declaration argued that he only wrote that Ronson was *holding* coke, not planting it, and that she had *allegedly* entered into a deal with the paparazzi—duly rejected the settlement offer, Freedman said.