

Movie Game Is Not So Easy

The Clippers' Brand has tried to transfer his basketball success to Hollywood, but his time as a producer has been marred by lawsuits.

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Elton Brand's reputation as an emerging NBA star has risen this season along with the Clippers' fortunes. His more checkered career as a Hollywood movie producer hasn't been getting as much attention.

A production company in which Brand is a 50% owner has generated at least as much litigation as box office buzz.

Gibraltar Entertainment has been named directly or in passing in four lawsuits since the beginning of this year, three that have been settled or are in settlement negotiations, according to lawyers involved.

None alleges wrongdoing by Brand. But they do underscore the difficulties that professional sports celebrities face when trying to leverage their success on the field or on the court into success in other areas.

How much money Brand has invested in Gibraltar or its ventures isn't known. But one attorney said Brand settled a \$250,000 claim out of his own funds to end a lawsuit.

"He was as stand-up a guy and as honorable a person as I have ever been in litigation against," said Bryan J. Freedman, a lawyer who represented producer Gerald Green. "He came down to my office, looked in my eyes, and did exactly what he said he was going to do."

Two of the cases derive from a single production, "Rescue Dawn," an adventure movie directed by idiosyncratic German filmmaker Werner Herzog, who is known for shooting in extreme conditions in remote locations around the globe. Herzog went to the jungles of Thailand to film much of "Rescue Dawn," which recounts an escape by two American pilots from a Laotian prison camp during the Vietnam War. According to a published report, the \$10-million production financed by Gibraltar ran out of money, temporarily stranding some crew members until the firm could raise the money to bring them home.

Brand declined to talk about Gibraltar or his partner in the venture, nightclub operator Steve Marlton. His agent, David Falk, didn't return calls for comment.

Brand, 27, is hardly the first sports celebrity, especially in Southern California, to hear Hollywood beckoning. Scores of players have tried to use their fame and connections to build movie careers, and it's not unusual for a player of sufficient stature to claim a producing credit on a film. Former Laker Shaquille O'Neal is listed as executive producer on "Kazaam" and "Steel," released in 1996 and 1997. Magic Johnson owns an independent production company with six films and TV series to its credit in a business portfolio that also includes a movie theater chain and retail and health club franchises.

But it's unusual, and perilous, for a player as early in his career as Brand to try establishing himself in Hollywood as an independent producer. The deal-making is notoriously complicated; seasoned executives from other industries who expected their money and smarts to take the town by storm have been known to flee, bloodied and poorer, after only brief flings in moviemaking.

"It's a business in which glamour outweighs reason," said Martin H. Kaplan, a former screenwriter and Walt Disney Co. executive who is associate dean at USC's Annenberg School for Communication. "For some reason, although 90% of all movies fail, people think that the rules of economics and human history apply to everybody but them." He said that most successful people in the movie business follow the rule of never spending their own money, extracting capital from starry-eyed newcomers instead.