

'Extra' Host Maria Menounos Beats Celebrity Stylist's Defamation Lawsuit

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At a Hollywood event, Menounos shouted at a celebrity stylist, "Dolce & Gabbana won't lend to me anymore because they said you never returned anything."



A defamation lawsuit against *Extra* host **Maria Menounos** that had an odd beginning has taken a surprising twist and has now been concluded.

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Menounos was sued by **Lindsay Albanese**, a stylist who formerly worked for Menounos when the television personality was on *Access Hollywood*. At a June 3, 2011, event at the MTV Gift Suite at the W Hotel in Hollywood, Menounos went up to her former stylist and loudly proclaimed, "Dolce & Gabbana won't lend to me anymore because they said you never returned anything."

Albanese didn't take kindly to being called a thief within earshot of others in the industry.

In response to the defamation suit, Menounos first attempted to defeat it by taking advantage of California's anti-SLAPP statute, which provides a quick out from frivolous litigation in instances of a defendant's First Amendment rights being threatened. But Menounos needed to show that Albanese's claim arose from free speech in connection with an issue of public interest.

Menounos failed there. In August, a California appeals court **ruled** that while "Albanese is rather well known in some circles for her work as a celebrity stylist and fashion expert, there is no evidence that the public is interested in this private dispute concerning her alleged theft."

Back at the trial court, the parties engaged in discovery and Menounos aimed to defeat the lawsuit with a more common defense to a defamation claim -- that the statement at the Hollywood event was true, or substantially true. That strategy appears to have worked.

The two sides have executed a settlement agreement, and *The Hollywood Reporter* has obtained a copy. According to a recital of facts from the settlement agreement:

"Through two subpoenas issued by Menounos' counsel to NBC and the Beverly Hills police department, Menounos has come into the possession of the following documents: (1) police records relating to Albanese's grand theft conviction in 2000, and (2) documents from NBC relating to Albanese's employment and various theft allegations made against Albanese which ultimately led to her termination from NBC (the "Subpoena Documents"). Albanese maintains that she was not terminated from NBC for theft."

The agreement makes clear that Menounos isn't paying anything to Albanese to settle the lawsuit. Albanese, however, gets Menounos to release potential claims for malicious prosecution and abuse of process.

Albanese's attorney declined comment.

"This was a ridiculous lawsuit that never should have been filed from the beginning," says **Bryan Freedman**, the attorney from Freedman & Taitelman who represented Menounos. "The evidence obtained in the case unequivocally showed that this case was, at best, frivolous. In over 22 years of practicing law, I have rarely seen a plaintiff so abruptly abandon her entire case in exchange for absolutely nothing in return."

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