

King lawsuit suffers setback

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rodney King's lawsuit over his 1991 beating was dealt a setback Monday when a federal judge dismissed former police Chief Daryl Gates as a defendant.

King's lawyers did not show that Gates was malicious and his management of the police department was not an issue, U.S. District Court Judge John Davies ruled before defense lawyers began presenting their cases.

"Bad management is not enough," Davies said. "Allowing racism is not enough. Poor supervision is not enough. There is no evidence of causation."

Gates' dismissal surprised King's lawyers. Lawyer John Burris said the judge's ruling was a mistake and that it may be appealed.

"One of our objectives was to send a message that chiefs can be held accountable for the conduct of their officers," Burris said.

"Without Gates, that objective will not be attained."

Four other officers who were bystanders at the March 3, 1991, beating were also dropped Monday because their role was too minor to make them liable for punitive damages, the judge said.

Just six of the original 15 defendants remain in the lawsuit. Four other officers were dropped Friday. King's lawyers already have won \$3.8 million from the city in the trial's compensatory damage phase. The punitive damage phase seeks money from individuals.

Gates retired under fire after the 1992 riots, which were sparked by the acquittals of four officers on state assault charges in the beating of the black motorist. Those officers - Stacey Koon, Laurence Powell, Theodore Briseno and Timothy Wind - and two others are the remaining defendants in the law-

suit. The judge said the only evidence presented against Gates was the Christopher Commission report, which did not blame Gates for King's beating by white officers.

"The plaintiffs have failed to prove that Mr. Gates acted maliciously or out of spite or was callously indifferent to the rights and safety of others," Davies said. "The Christopher Commission report is silent on the issues here."

The commission found evidence of racism and excessive force in the department in a review after King's beating. The commission was headed by Warren Christopher, now secretary of state.

The judge said last week's testimony against Gates by a retired deputy police chief was not enough to make Gates liable for punitive damages.

Offensive words ousted from Scrabble dictionary

PAWTUCKET, R.I. (AP) — Scrabble players' vocabulary is being corrected: Up to 100 words considered offensive will soon v-a-n-i-s-h from the game's official dictionary.

In response to a growing number of complaints, between 75 and 100 words, including ethnic and racial slurs, will be purged from the next edition of The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, said Wayne Charness, spokesman for Hasbro Inc., which owns Milton Bradley.

"We're just trying to be sensitive to the complaints we've received and do the right thing," Charness said.

The words eliminated will be officially off-limits to players in tournaments and clubs. For casual players, Scrabble rules allow for any dictionary to be used as long as it is agreed upon before a game begins.

Scrabble purists are not looking forward to fewer chances to score.

"A lot of Scrabble experts are not particularly happy about this," said John D. Williams Jr., executive director of the National Scrabble Association.

"They see this as game pieces. They are able to separate the word from the meaning," he said. "To a Scrabble player, you're taking away 75 and 100 potential scores."

Astronomers opt for solar sightseeing in Ohio

SANDUSKY, Ohio (AP) — One day a few months back, astronomer George Kaplan was sitting at his desk at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington when he had a vision.

Why not have a dozen or so of the nation's finest astronomers put on Hawaiian shirts and straw hats, get on a plane and fly to Cleveland for the last major solar eclipse in the United States this millennium?

On Tuesday, Kaplan's audacious - some might say poetic - vision was fulfilled, more or less.

True, not everyone wore Hawaiian shirts - there was at least one green plaid shirt under rainbow suspenders. But there they were, a dozen astronomers plus four assorted hangers-on, deplaning in Cleveland, hopping into rental cars and trekking to East Harbor State Park near Sandusky just in time for a little "eclipse fishing," as one of them put it.

Or, as Kerry Kingham, a radio astronomer at the Naval Observatory, said as he watched his colleagues eat junk food and stare heavenward behind pink Mylar sunglasses, "This has got to be one of the most under-utilized group of astronomical experts ever."

No matter. The trip - which, the astronomers stressed, was NOT an official research mission of the Naval Observatory - was purely for fun. And like hundreds of thousands of other Americans who fell within the band of eclipse Tuesday, they oohed and aahed and lolled on their backs as the moon slid across the sun like a nickel overlapping a quarter.

An annular eclipse is distinguished from a total solar eclipse by the blinding band of sun - the annulus - that surrounds the moon at the peak of convergence. The moon doesn't fully cover the sun because it is relatively far from Earth in its elliptical orbit.

Tuesday's annular eclipse, the last in this

country until 2012, reached maximum coverage in a 140-mile-wide swath that ran from El Paso, Texas, to Portland, Maine.

"Absolutely exciting," was how El Paso Planetarium administrator John Peterson described it.

"There is definitely something magic about an annular eclipse," he said. "That ring of fire up there is spectacular."

In New York City, which was far enough off the path to see only a partial eclipse, several hundred people joined actor Dick Van Dyke on the edge of Central Park to watch the event, such as it was.

"I never could understand why these are so rare," Van Dyke said. "You've got the sun, the moon, and the Earth all out there. Why doesn't this happen more often?"

The Naval Observatory group might have explained it to him (there's a lot of space out there, Dick), but they were several hundreds of miles away in northern Ohio. They chose their location strategically, and for the purest of scientific motives: It was cheap.

A few months ago, Kaplan noticed that Southwest Airlines was offering introductory rates for its new Baltimore-Cleveland service that were astronomically low: \$44 round-trip.

"So I just sent E-mail around, and I got a dozen responses immediately. ... We figured, for \$44, even if the eclipse is a total bust and it's pouring down rain, we can find something to do in Cleveland for a couple of hours," he said.

As it turned out, Tuesday was a glorious day - just perfect for watching an eclipse. So the astronomers set up their tripods and picnic blankets on a lawn next to Lake Erie, and waited.

"Shall we put the flag up?" asked Merri Sue Carter, a radio astronomer and self-pro-

claimed cheerleader of the expedition.

Up went the flag - which shows an observatory under a full sky of stars - on the wall of a restroom.

"Well," observed John Bangert, another of the astronomers, "we've secured the restroom. This is beginning to remind me of the invasion of Grenada."

Amazingly, most of the astronomers said an annular eclipse is not particularly interesting from a scientific point of view. But they figured it was worth it anyway to take the day off from work and pay their own expenses, such as they were.

"I guess if you're a veterinarian, you still like to go to the park and look at dogs," Carter said. "I guess for us, we're all lucky because our hobby has become our career."

Like school kids across the country, the astronomers stared at the eclipse through silly-looking sunglasses. Some of them also used pieces of exposed film - something, they conceded, that they wouldn't advise the general public to do.

And when the eclipse achieved annularity, or whatever it does at its peak, they went orbital.

"Oh man, look at that! That's so incredible."

"It's closing!"
"There it is!"
"Do it!"
"Come on!"
"Oh!"
"Here we are - annularity!"
"Who!"
"Does anybody know what time it is?"
"Does anybody care?"

With that, the moon slowly slipped away from the sun, heads returned to Earth and somebody began softly singing. "The party's over. ..."



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