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## Experts Say Bryant Settlement Makes Sense

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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DENVER (AP) -- Experts believe a settlement between Kobe Bryant and the woman who has accused him of rape would offer both sides a way to avoid a potentially embarrassing trial that would bring out intimate details of their lives.

ABC News Radio reported Tuesday that the NBA star and his 20-year-old accuser have reached an agreement in principle, with a settlement possible as early as this week.

Attorneys for Bryant did not return calls, and the woman's attorneys declined to comment on the report.

Earlier, the woman's attorneys had scheduled a seven-hour questioning session with Bryant on Friday, but it was scratched, prompting speculation a settlement was close.

Denver attorney Bill Keating said a settlement always seemed the only logical end for the high-profile lawsuit.

Bryant and many observers ``recognize this is a case likely to be very time-consuming, very expensive and a case that delves into intensely personal issues on both sides," Keating said.

A settlement would offer Bryant ``an end to litigation, an end to courtrooms, an end to meetings with lawyers," Denver attorney Larry Pozner said. ``And what you give back is money, and what Kobe Bryant has a lot of is money."

The woman filed her lawsuit in Denver federal court in August, three weeks before the criminal case against the Los Angeles Lakers star collapsed when she decided she could not participate in the trial.

Allegations in the lawsuit echoed those of the criminal case: The woman said Bryant flirted with her during a tour of the Vail-area resort where she worked in June 2003. After the two ended up in his room, they began to kiss and Bryant became more aggressive, holding her by the throat while he raped her from behind.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages for mental injuries, humiliation and public scorn. Bryant, a married father of one, issued an apology to the woman but maintained the sex was consensual.

Bryant, 27, has to bring an end to the civil case if he hopes to regain a semblance of the rising-star image that brought him lucrative product endorsements before he was charged with sexual assault, said David Carter, a sports marketing consultant with the Los Angeles-based Sports Business Group.

``There's going to be some real short-term pain attached, but absent this, he'll never be able to move on to any kind of marketing career," Carter said. ``Without this closure, without putting it behind him, he's left twisting in the marketing wind."

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