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## Kobe had signed big deal before arrest

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DENVER -- Nike is using photos of [Kobe Bryant](#) for the first time since his arrest two years ago for an alleged assault on a female employee at a Colorado resort.

The ad appears in Sports Illustrated.

Prosecutors dismissed a rape charge against Bryant last September after the woman who accused him refused to go ahead with the case. Bryant publicly apologized to her without admitting any guilt.



Bryant

A civil suit filed by the woman against Bryant was settled out of court. Its details were not released.

"Nike agrees with most NBA observers that Kobe ranks among the very best players in the NBA, and his training and preparation are key elements of his game," said Nike spokesman Rodney Knox.

He said the ad in the Sports Illustrated was the first to use Bryant's image since his arrest. Earlier this year Bryant's name appeared in an ad.

While the ad doesn't reference the rape allegation, it does mention recent criticisms of Bryant.

After each negative statement -- "selfish" "uncoachable," "outcast," and "stubborn" among others -- the ad alludes to how Bryant responds: curls, sit ups, lunges and free throws.

Bryant had signed a \$45 million deal with Nike shortly before his arrest. McDonald's and Nutella both dropped Bryant from their roster of celebrity endorsers after his arrest.

David Carter, principal of the Los Angeles-based Sports Business Group and a professor of sports business at the University of Southern California, said Nike's decision should not be a surprise.

"The companies that are closest to the athletes, footwear and apparel, would be easily the most likely to come back and embrace him, sooner than the traditional consumer products," said Carter.

"Athleticism trumps character flaws. Great athletes that perform well, that tends to overcome any other trouble they have had, be it with teammates, or communities, or even issues relating to the police blotter," he said.

Cynthia Stone, spokeswoman for the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, criticized Nike's decision. "Mr. Bryant was never convicted of a crime, but he certainly did admit some culpability in the apology that he released after the criminal case," said Stone.

"Corporations like Nike play a huge part in creating role models for millions of young athletes. It would be a great inspiration to those young people if the endorsers were not only accomplished athletes, but also had a reputation for positive and ethical conduct."

*ESPN.com writer Darren Rovell contributed to this story.*

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