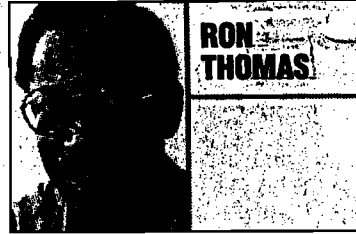


Carlesimo also under scrutiny

BIMBO COLES WAS in tears. Felton Spencer said, "I don't think it's fair." Brian Shaw accused management of not coming to the aid of a troubled player. And the words "only two days" virtually became a mantra throughout the Golden State Warriors' locker room.

Wednesday night, Latrell Sprewell's teammates couldn't believe that Warriors' management had gotten rid of their \$32-million man just two days after he had literally gone for the throat of coach P.J. Carlesimo. But maybe that prepared them for the bigger blow yesterday, when NBA Commissioner David Stern



banned Sprewell for the next year.

"I thought there would be more of an investigation," Joe Smith, Sprewell's best friend on the Warriors, said after the team suspended him.

Here's my question to Smith: What was there to investigate?

The Warriors had to cut him loose once the basic facts of the

incident had been confirmed — that an enraged Sprewell grabbed Carlesimo by the throat Monday, left the scene, then returned 15 minutes and threatened to kill his coach if Sprewell wasn't traded.

In the game of real life, if you choke your boss, you're out the door. What Sprewell did took the phrase "player-coach confrontation" to a new level, hopefully never to be seen again.

"I've heard it all, seen it all," said Warriors guard Duane Ferrell, a 10-year NBA veteran. "But I just haven't seen anyone just grab a coach and attack him.

"I've seen players put their

finger in a coach's face. I've seen players chase a coach out of a locker room and threaten to kick a coach's butt. I've seen players run at coaches and get close to them, but not actually physically touch them."

Warriors' management took the high road, saying dumping Sprewell was an ethical decision based on their refusal to give in to insubordination. But the fact is, they also admitted trying to trade him beforehand.

One can imagine what those conversations sounded like? General manager Garry St. Jean: "What would you give us for Sprewell?"

Opposing GM: "How about a
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box of Cracker Jacks and a plastic toy to be mailed later?"

The Warriors had no bargaining power whatsoever, and they must have known that even if they worked out a trade, the NBA was going to squash it by suspending Sprewell for a long, long time. No way the NBA was going to let a player attack a coach, and then get his wish by getting traded. If Sprewell hadn't been suspended, Stern would have been facing a coaches' revolt.

So freeing up about \$24 million on the salary cap by suspending Sprewell looked irresistibly attractive to the Warriors.

They might lose their upcoming battle with the NBA Players Association, which will file a grievance on Sprewell's behalf. "To strip a player of his ability to pursue his livelihood for a full

year based on one isolated incident is excessive and unreasonable punishment," union head Billy Hunter said. "A \$25 million forfeiture of salary and one-year expulsion is staggering." Whatever happens, suspending Sprewell was the best option the Warriors had.

That removed one problem. Now the Warriors have to figure out what to do with another one — Carlesimo.

"(Sprewell) has a stigma that's going to follow him for the rest of his life," Warriors guard Muggsy Bogues said. "And so does P.J."

Usually, Carlesimo is a chatterbox with a raspy voice, like Anthony Quinn's portrayal of Mountain Rivera in "Requiem for a Heavyweight." But Wednesday night, Carlesimo's voice barely reached whisper level. He looked and sounded emotionally wrung out.

Three seasons ago, it was Don Nelson who left the Warriors for health reasons after getting stressed out over the Chris

Webber ordeal. Carlesimo soon may be occupying Nelson's old place in the coach's rest and recuperation center.

It wouldn't surprise me a bit if St. Jean, who sought several head-coaching jobs after being fired by the Sacramento Kings last season, switches jobs with Carlesimo before the season ends.

If Carlesimo remains as coach, he's got to temper his in-your-face, confrontational style. It got him fired in Portland, even though he compiled a 137-109 record and made the playoffs three consecutive years. Even if the Warriors had a billion dollars to spend on free agents, a bunch of them won't come here because of Carlesimo's turbulent track record.

In less than four NBA seasons, he's had bitter relationships with Rod Strickland, Isaiah Rider and Cliff Robinson in Portland, and now with Sprewell here. Granted, they're not the Boy Scouts of the NBA, but coaches are paid to find a way to get along with difficult

players. And they're certainly not paid to alienate mild-mannered players, either.

Professional athletes get paid unfathomable amounts of money, but that doesn't mean they leave their feelings at the locker room door. If a coach plays tough-guy too often, any success he achieves occurs despite him, not because of him.

Some players respond well to strident criticism, Ferrell said, but "Others go into a shell. Then other ones feel as though you're attacking their manhood and they're not going to stand for it. Like, 'I'm a grown man. I'm not a kid. You don't talk to me that way.'

"I think it's all up to the individual."

Now, it's all up to P.J.

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