



OJ Simpson, who is serving a sentence for armed robbery and kidnapping, arrives for his evidentiary hearing

Arguably, American scandal sheets have never had a better friend than OJ Simpson. I say 'arguably' because there is always a strong field jockeying for the cover of *The National Enquirer*, *Star Magazine* and the *Weekly World News*, including the philandering golf star Tiger Woods, the deceased pop idol Michael Jackson and whatever Hollywood starlet happened to end up pregnant or spotted in a bikini bearing an unseemly case of cellulite. But when it comes to the sheer consistency of baring his ass in public, it would be hard to surpass Orenthal James Simpson, the former National Football League running back, TV pitchman, broadcaster and actor who in a previous legal hassle that became known as 'The Trial of Century' was acquitted of the horrific 1994 murder of his ex-wife and an innocent bystander. A 2007 armed showdown with some sports memorabilia dealers in Las Vegas catapulted him into the prison cell that a racially-charged verdict had spared him years before in Los Angeles.

But OJ did not slip into the obscurity that typically embraces apprehended criminals. In February, *The National Enquirer* scooped their bottom-feeding rivals by reporting that Simpson was savagely beaten in the prison yard by skinheads who apparently overheard him boast of his sexual conquests of beautiful white women. According to an exclusive interview conducted by *The National Enquirer* with Bruce Fromong, who had been one of the memorabilia dealers

OJ held up but has since befriended, enraged white supremacists 'waited for a day when [Simpson] would be in the exercise yard without his usual posse of black prisoners'. Far young and stronger than the 65-year-old OJ, the assailant 'rained blows on his head, shoulders and upper body – and continued to punch him savagely after he fell unconscious to the ground. He was covered with blood from deep cuts to his face'. *The National Enquirer* added that OJ spent two and a half weeks in the prison infirmary and has subsequently fallen into a deep depression. But Simpson has since said the attack never happened. In fact, a source close to him said that when he heard what had been reported, OJ 'laughed his ass off'.

So who are we to believe? OJ Simpson, who is an All-Pro pathological liar? Or *The National Enquirer*, which is to serious journalism what beef jerky is to a balanced diet?

Go with *The National Enquirer*.

Even if the alleged incident in the prison yard is untrue, just the possibility of it undoubtedly warmed the hearts of millions of Americans who believed that he escaped justice in the 1995 slayings of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and bystander Ronald Goldman. No one is more deserving of the slop that passes for prison fare and the penal accommodations that it comes with than Simpson, whose criminal activity pre-dated the grisly slaughter that Sunday evening in June 1994, where the throat of Nicole was slashed and Goldman stabbed 22 times. But 'The Juice' is as hard to bring down off the field as he was carrying

the pigskin, which is why once again we find him in a courtroom surrounded by a team of defence attorneys. Four years into his prison sentence in Nevada, where instead of No 32 he wears No 10278220, Simpson has asked for a new trial in the memorabilia-caper due to misconduct by his former lawyer, Yale Galanter.

In his appearance before court, during which he looked greyer and heavier, Simpson said Galanter had advised that it was perfectly fine for him to pursue memorabilia that had been stolen from him just so long as he did not do it in as forcible a manner; OJ said he had no idea that his accomplices were carrying guns (which, as guns are apt to do, went off). Additionally, Simpson said his former attorney had not told him of the plea bargain that had been offered.

OJ said Galanter told him: 'Relax, relax OJ, I got it. I got it. I will get you out of this.' He ended up getting 33 years.

Unlike the legal stewpot that embroils OJ Simpson, no verdict has been rendered in the case of Oscar Pistorius, who either accidentally or purposely killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, with a firearm in February. The legendary Pistorius, a double amputee athlete who ascended to Olympic glory on carbon fibre running blades, is due again in court on 19 August, at which point it is expected he will be given a trial date in the coming months. Although Pistorius has claimed the shooting was an accident and has pleaded innocent, there is a parallel with the circumstances that surrounded Simpson (who, by the way, also pleaded innocent to the charges against him). Both cases involved a superstar athlete, a dead woman and swarms of media from across the globe. No story held Americans more spellbound than the arrest, prosecution and controversial acquittal of OJ Simpson. I suspect the same could be said of the Pistorius imbroglio.

I covered the Simpson scandal for the paper where I once worked, not the trial but the first weeks of the affair – including the slow-speed chase he led the Los Angeles Police Department on in his Ford Bronco before he surrendered at his Brentwood estate (which, by the way, was torn down and rebuilt because no one wanted to live in it). Up the previous evening on an assignment, I had slept in that Monday when the telephone rang at 11am. 'Get to the airport and fly out to ►

OJ REVISITED

As the Oscar Pistorius case proceeds through the judicial system, we take a look back at another superstar athlete who was charged with murder: OJ Simpson

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LA – OJ has been arrested for whacking his ex-wife,' the editor ordered. So that I did. I threw some clothes in a bag, caught a cab to the airport, and by 7:30pm Pacific Coast Time found myself standing on the very sidewalk where only hours before a massacre had occurred. But there was no trace that any violence had occurred by then. A police crime scene crew had wiped the area clean of any sign of blood. With a notebook in hand, I spoke with a few passersby and jotted down the odd impression, only to have someone lean out the window of a speeding car and shout at me: 'Vulture!!!'

Until he became the primary suspect in this stunning crime, few were aware of the demons that had lurked within OJ. To the general public, he appeared to be an altogether likeable fellow. Hertz Car Rental teamed him up with golf legend Arnold Palmer in an advertising campaign that depicted OJ leaping over luggage in airports. America also came to know him as an actor who had parts in *The Naked Gun*, *Capricorn One*, *The Towering Inferno* and an array of other action and comedy vehicles. But what went unreported was his propensity for violence.

As a boy growing up in the projects in San Francisco, he became a member of a gang, the Persian Warriors, and frequently found himself cooling off in Juvenile Hall. Because he was also a fine athlete, his transgressions came to the attention of San Francisco Giants legend Willie Mays, who sat OJ down for a chat. Simpson would later claim it had a profound effect on him. But as the years passed, it was clear to those closest to him that he was not the man he appeared in public. When it comes to women, he either cheated on them or beat them up. In a letter Nicole sent Simpson in an apparent attempt to force him to tear up their prenuptial agreement prior to their 1992 divorce, she referred to an incident in which OJ 'beat the holy hell out of me. You told the X-ray lab I fell off my bike'. Although the police were summoned to the Simpson estate, OJ was not arrested and the story was buried. Had OJ been held accountable, chances are that later the same would not have happened to Nicole or Goldman.

Every piece of evidence pointed to OJ and only OJ. But he assembled the sharpest team of defence attorneys money could buy, including Johnnie Cochran, F Lee Bailey, Alan Dershowitz, Robert Kardashian (yes, the late father of those Kardashians), Gerald Uelmen, Carl E Douglas and DNA specialists Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld. Weighing in



Motorists watch police cars pursue OJ Simpson on a slow-speed car chase in Los Angeles in 1994

for The State of California: Marsha Clark and Christopher Darden. Even with the evidence apparently lined up in their favour, the prosecution could not offset the defence strategy, which 'played the race card' and held the Los Angeles Police Department accountable for their poor handling of previous cases involving African Americans.

F Lee Bailey coaxed LAPD detective Mark Fuhrman to admit under cross-examination that he once used 'the N-word' to describe African Americans 10 years prior to his testimony. But it was Cochran who held command over the courtroom. In an extraordinary piece of theatrics, the late African American attorney arranged for OJ to try on a leather glove that had been collected at the scene. OJ pushed his hand into it and grimaced. As Clark and Darden looked on in shock, Cochran announced to the jury: 'If the glove does not fit, you must acquit!' And they did just that. A jury of 10 women and two men (which included nine African Americans, one Hispanic and two Caucasians) deliberated for just four hours and returned a verdict of: Not Guilty.

Some 100-million people worldwide dropped whatever they were doing as the verdict was read. Some interesting data on that: long-distance telephone call volume decreased by 58%; volume on the New York Stock Exchange was off by 41%. A popular pizza chain experienced a spike in orders 15 minutes prior to the announcement of the verdict but not a single order in the United States between 1pm and 1:05pm. Someone also calculated that the work stoppage that occurred amounted to \$480-million in lost productivity. Television cameras ►

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placed at strategic locations across America captured the deep division the verdict ignited: African Americans leaped in joy that OJ had been acquitted, Caucasians sat in stunned silence, their lips only forming the words: 'Oh no.' And OJ himself? He just grinned as if he had gotten away with murder.

Supposedly, criminals always return to the scene of the crime. In the case of OJ Simpson, he did precisely that in a 2007 book he authored, with help from a ghostwriter, called *If I Did It: Confessions of the Killer*. *The National Enquirer* (who else?) leaked the publication plans for the book the year before, at which point OJ denied that such a project was in the works. Of course, a book was very much under way. Originally, it was commissioned and scheduled to be published by Regan Books, a spawn of the Rupert Murdoch empire (of course). Publication was to coincide with a special interview with OJ on the Fox Broadcasting Company, another jewel in the crown of the eternally bottom-feeding Murdoch. (In case you were wondering, this is called 'synergy'.) In any case, Regan Books stepped aside when the Goldman family was awarded the rights to it as partial settlement of the \$33.5-million wrongful death judgement they and the other injured parties won against Simpson in civil court. (To explain: OJ was exonerated in the criminal case, but held liable in the civil action. Which is to say: He did it.)

Given the pain he had inflicted upon the families involved – including his own

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Simpson tries on a leather glove allegedly used in the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman

children – it seemed inconceivable that Simpson would revisit his ghastly deed in so-called 'fictional' form. But propriety is not a word with which OJ has any acquaintance. In this version of events, he delves into his relationship with Nicole and follows up with how he would have murdered her and Goldman ... you know, if he had actually done it. At one point in the text, OJ observes: 'I have never seen so much blood in my life.' The Goldmans published it with Beaufort Books, but not without submitting the title to some editorial surgery. On the cover of the book, the word 'If' is reduced so far in size as to be invisible. Spelled out in far larger type are the words: 'I Did It'. For the Goldmans and the others, it will be the closest OJ comes to a true confession unless he experiences a revelation on his deathbed. For the reading public, it was another addition to the seemingly unending catalogue of books on Simpson, albeit some readers found it somewhat of a guilty pleasure. A review on Amazon called it: 'Trash but Entertaining Trash'.

One would have supposed that OJ would have kept a low profile in the wake of his acquittal. But a hood is always a hood. No sooner than his unconscious mind compelled him to admit to the murders, it also compelled him to find a way to end up back in prison. Upon discovering that some articles of his personal collection of memorabilia had been stolen, he and a gang of armed thugs stormed into the Palms Casino Hotel to retrieve the items from some dealers who were in possession of them. Tempers flared. Guns were brandished. OJ and a co-defendant were convicted on 12 charges, including armed robbery and kidnapping. The attorney who assured him that 'I got it' said the jury could not separate the memorabilia case from the slayings of 13 years before. What is interesting is that the memorabilia Simpson alleged had been stolen did not amount to much given the outcome that occurred. There were a few pictures Nicole had taken, a Hall of Fame certificate and – oh yes: a photograph of OJ with legendary Federal Bureau of Investigation director J Edgar Hoover, another man who was not what he seemed. ■

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