

Lawsuit Claims James Dolan Pressured Woman Into Sex

In the court filing, the woman also says Harvey Weinstein sexually assaulted her in a 2014 encounter that she believes was set up by Mr. Dolan. Both men denied her accusations.



By Ben Sisario

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A woman filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday accusing James L. Dolan, the entertainment and sports mogul behind Madison Square Garden and the New York Knicks, of pressuring her into unwanted sex and then coordinating an encounter with Harvey Weinstein, whom she accused of sexually assaulting her.

The woman, Kellye Croft, says in the court filing that she told Mr. Dolan — a former friend and business associate of Mr. Weinstein's — about the alleged incident after it occurred in early 2014, years before Mr. Dolan made public statements that he had been unaware of Mr. Weinstein's history of misconduct.

In her suit, filed in Federal District Court in Los Angeles, Ms. Croft says that in late 2013, when she was 27, she was hired to work as a massage therapist on a tour by the classic rock band Eagles. Mr. Dolan — who moonlights as a blues-rock musician — was an opening act with his band JD & the Straight Shot.

In court papers, Ms. Croft describes the experience as a dream gig that went awry because of the misconduct of two men who were among the most powerful figures in media and entertainment. First, Ms. Croft's suit says, she was pressured into unwanted sex with Mr. Dolan, and then found herself alone in a Beverly Hills hotel room with Mr. Weinstein, who chased her down a hallway, held her down and penetrated her against her will.

In a statement, Ms. Croft said: "James Dolan manipulated me, brought me to California to abuse me and then set me up for a vicious attack by Weinstein."

E. Danya Perry, a lawyer for Mr. Dolan, said in a statement: "There is absolutely no merit to any of the allegations against Mr. Dolan. Kellye Croft and James Dolan had a friendship." She added: "Mr. Dolan always believed Ms. Croft to be a good person and is surprised she would agree to these claims. Bottom line, this is not a he said/she said matter and there is compelling evidence to back up our position. We look forward to proving that in court."

Jennifer Bonjean, a lawyer for Mr. Weinstein, said he "vehemently denies these meritless allegations and looks forward to litigating these claims in court of law where the truth will be revealed."

Douglas H. Wigdor, a lawyer for Ms. Croft, said, "With the filing of today's complaint, it is time to finally hold Dolan accountable for his outrageous conduct."

The suit accuses Mr. Dolan of sex trafficking for these incidents, arguing that he facilitated her transport "for purposes of sex induced by force, fraud, or coercion." The suit also accuses Mr. Dolan and Mr. Weinstein — who is serving a 23-year prison sentence for felony sex crimes — of sexual assault and forcible touching.

Ms. Croft's suit says she was hired to be a tour masseuse for Glenn Frey, one of Eagles' founding members, who died in 2016, but that she was allowed to book massage appointments for other members of the tour. She says Mr. Dolan interceded on her behalf when she had a conflict with a tour manager who was later fired, and that Ms. Croft began to understand how powerful Mr. Dolan was when he had Mr. Frey apologize to her "repeatedly and profusely" about the issue.

Mr. Dolan booked a massage, and at his appointment, the suit says, he dragged Ms. Croft to a couch and forced her hands between his knees. She resisted, she says, and was “adamant” that she did not want any sexual relationship, but he pressured her into sex. According to the court papers, Mr. Dolan “summoned” Ms. Croft to his room multiple times during the tour, and “she felt obligated to submit to sex with him.”

In January 2014, the suit says, Ms. Croft rejoined the tour in the Los Angeles area, where Eagles had a residency at the Forum. But the suit says the real reason for her presence was that Mr. Dolan “wished to sexually exploit Ms. Croft.”

On that same trip, Ms. Croft says she met Mr. Weinstein in an encounter that the suit alleges was coordinated by Mr. Dolan. While waiting for the elevator at her hotel, Ms. Croft says, she chatted with Mr. Weinstein, who invited her to his room to discuss a job providing massages to actors on movie sets. While the lawsuit says that Mr. Weinstein asked her if she was “the massage therapist” and said that Mr. Dolan had said great things about her, the suit does not elaborate on its claim that Mr. Dolan had “coordinated” her encounter with Mr. Weinstein.

The suit says Ms. Croft became uncomfortable when Mr. Weinstein asked her to try on clothes in front of him — she had just been out shopping, and still had her bags with her — and then requested a massage on his bed. She began walking down the hall to her own room, but Mr. Weinstein, in a bathrobe, followed her.

Ms. Croft says in her suit that Mr. Weinstein forced his way into her room and began to sexually assault her but stopped when the phone rang.

It was Mr. Dolan calling, and Mr. Weinstein left her room. According to the suit, Ms. Croft went to Mr. Dolan’s room and told him about the assault. She said in the court papers that Mr. Dolan said he “was not at all surprised” and that Mr. Weinstein “was ‘a troubled person’ that had a lot of ‘serious issues,’ but that his friends were ‘trying to get him to address’ those issues.”

Mr. Dolan and Mr. Weinstein had been close friends for years, and Mr. Dolan served as a board member of the Weinstein Company, Mr. Weinstein’s production company, for about a year beginning in 2015.

In 2018, after investigations by The New York Times and The New Yorker exposed Mr. Weinstein’s history of sexual misconduct, and he had been accused of harassment or assault by dozens of women, Mr. Dolan released a song with his band, JD & the Straight Shot called “I Should’ve Known.” Its lyrics address a broken friendship:

I should’ve known
I should’ve thrown
Myself across his tracks
Stopped him from these vile attacks

In interviews publicizing the song, Mr. Dolan connected it to Mr. Weinstein “and others” who were revealed to have assaulted or abused women. “What did I miss?” Mr. Dolan said in one interview.

He also cast doubt on a lawsuit filed in late 2017 by six female victims of Mr. Weinstein, who alleged that a number of men who had served as board members of the Weinstein Company had been aware of Mr. Weinstein’s predatory conduct, and were complicit in covering it up.

“I just think it’s ridiculous,” Mr. Dolan said of the suit in an interview with ESPN the following year. The Weinstein Company declared bankruptcy and the suit was eventually settled, but company executives and directors, including Mr. Dolan, were released from claims.

Ben Sisario covers the music industry. He has been writing for The Times since 1998. More about Ben Sisario