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Latest scandals spell trouble for Gibson's tarnished star

By Paula Bustamante
Agence France-Presse

Posted date: July 17, 2010

LOS ANGELES – Hollywood observers believe Mel Gibson's temper may have landed him in more than just hot water amid a furor over alleged rants against his ex-girlfriend. This time it may cost his career.

The latest scandal stems from profane and rage-filled comments posted on the celebrity gossip website RadarOnline.com which were culled from audio tapes, allegedly of Gibson threatening and cursing his ex-girlfriend, Russian musician Oksana Grigorieva.

The tapes have only further tarnished the reputation of devout Catholic Gibson, already known for his scathing comments against blacks and Jews.

While the tapes have yet to be authenticated, neither Gibson nor his lawyers have issued any denial since they first surfaced a week ago.

And with horrendous details of his private life in full view -- the culmination of an ugly breakup between Grigorieva, 40, and Gibson, 54, following a January beating in which he allegedly knocked out some of her teeth -- agents and fellow actors were quick to turn their backs on the star.

Among the first was the William Morris Endeavor agency headed by powerful agent Ari Emanuel, who has made no secret in the past of his disdain for the "Mad Max" star after an alcohol-fueled anti-Semitic outburst became public in 2006.

"Stars have come back from scandals before, but the number of times Mel Gibson has been in the news for aggressive and abusive behavior, along with racist and sexist remarks, makes him a poor bet for being one of those who manage to rebuild their careers," University of Southern California professor Leo Braudy told AFP.

"Now that he has been dropped by his agent, and denounced by a number of fellow stars, it seems like a real uphill battle, which would make even investors who have some faith in his talent very wary."

Movie agents and actors, who requested anonymity in order to speak more freely about the case, predicted a rough road ahead for Gibson, who received two Oscars for his acting and directing of "Braveheart." The 1995 drama was nominated for 10 Oscars and scored five.

"His career has taken a real downturn...No one of quality is going to want be associated with him," said popular culture critic Elayne Rapping.

"He's really ruined his reputation beyond repair. I've never seen anyone behaving in the way he is."

But she noted that Gibson's work does remain popular with some fans and he could continue directing and acting so long as he has his own production company.

The fallen star could thus dig into the fortune he has amassed from such blockbusters as "The Passion of the Christ," his 2004 film with a 30-million-dollar budget that took 600 million dollars in worldwide revenue.

A former agent with one of the most prestigious Hollywood talent agencies compared working with Gibson today to collaborating with O.J Simpson, the American football legend who was famously cleared of murdering his ex-wife and her

friend at a 1995 trial.

"Irrespective if the public accepts or doesn't accept it, the people who actually give him the jobs or help him get jobs no longer support him," the agent said, requesting not to be named.

"The actual Hollywood community doesn't want to work with him anymore. He's lost the support of his agent, he's lost the support of many financiers who could put into a movie."

A legal fight is also brewing between Gibson and Grigorieva, a Russian-born model and pianist, over the custody of their baby girl Lucia. The "Lethal Weapon" star is due in court on Tuesday in the domestic violence case.

But some point to Gibson's proven ability to rise and fall, again and again.

"Of course he needs agents," acknowledged veteran publicist Fredell Pogodin, who considers Gibson a "maverick" who is "not politically correct at all.

But she also added: "Does he have enough money though to, if he needed to, to go and fund and start his own films? Yes. And if those films are successful, will Hollywood then see him and want to work with him again? I'm sure."

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