

# Jacko indicted

## Grand jury indicts Michael Jackson while lawyers predict the King of Pop will be 'fully exonerated'

By Lynda Deutsch  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Michael Jackson's legal team said the pop star will be fully exonerated when he goes to trial on child molestation charges.

A source close to the case told The Associated Press on Thursday that Jackson was indicted, although authorities wouldn't confirm it and the indictment handed up by a Santa Barbara County grand jury was sealed.

Jackson's publicist and his legal defense team issued a statement Wednesday that did not confirm an indictment but said: "Mr. Jackson and his attorneys are confident that after a trial on these charges Mr. Jackson will be fully exonerated and that the allegations contained in the indictment will be shown to be patently false."

A judge has issued a gag order that prohibits attorneys on both sides from discussing the case with the media.

Jackson spokeswoman Raymone Bain told The Associated Press that she had spoken with Jackson on Wednesday, but would say only that the singer "is out and about."

The closed-door grand jury proceedings replaced a preliminary hearing, which is open to the public. Both proceedings are to determine whether there is enough evidence for a case to go to trial.

Four months ago, county prosecutors charged Jackson with seven counts of lewd or lascivious acts on a child under the age of 14 and two counts of administering an intoxicating agent, reportedly wine. Jackson pleaded innocent in January to those charges and has been free on \$3 million bail.

Jackson is scheduled to be arraigned April 30 on the grand jury indictment.

Jackson attorney Mark Geragos, reached by telephone, would not answer questions from The Associated Press.

The district attorney's office also would not comment about media reports, said Susan Tellem of Tellem Worldwide, hired to handle media inquiries for District Attorney Tom Sneddon in the case. Calls by The Associated Press to Sneddon and others in the office were not immediately returned.

Transcripts of the secret grand jury proceeding will be provided to Jackson's defense team within the next 10 days. The transcripts will then be made public 10 days after that unless Jackson's attorneys can convince a judge doing so would prejudice a future jury pool.

The grand jury has spent the last three weeks hearing from witnesses, including a 14-year-old boy who claims the superstar sexually abused him.

On Wednesday, grand jurors were whisked from the proceedings to the downtown Santa Barbara courthouse in vans with tinted windows. There they met with Sneddon and presiding Superior Court Judge Clifford Anderson.

Conspiracy and obstruction of justice charges were being considered against several associates of Michael Jackson, allegedly threatening the family of the boy who has accused Jackson of child molestation, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday.

An unidentified source close to the case told the Times the charges were under consideration.

Attorney Joseph Tacopina said there had been speculation that two of his clients, Vincent Amen and Frank Tyson, would be indicted by the grand jury or charged separately with alleged intimidation of witnesses. He denied the allegations and said two former Jackson employees would not appear before the grand jury.

The attorney said the accusations came from the boy's mother and were "patently false."

Tellem said the district attorney would have no comment because of a gag order.

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**Bucks even score with Pistons**

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — Michael Redd scored a career playoff-high 26 points as the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Detroit Pistons 92-88 Wednesday night, even the series at 1-1.

In other series Wednesday night, Minnesota and Miami took leads with home wins. Minnesota beat Denver 95-89. Miami routed New Orleans 95-78. On Thursday night, defending champion San Antonio and runner-up New Jersey will sweep their first-round series. Antonio is at Memphis, and Jersey at New York.

**Sharon loses support for Gaza withdrawal plan**

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's support for his hard-line Likud party less than two weeks before an election vote on his plan to pull out of the Strip and West Bank was shattered according to an opinion poll published Thursday.

Taking on his critics, Sharon addressed the Israeli parliament Thursday to defend the plan. "Anyone who wants Israel to be safe and not be dragged, led, or not led, must support the disengagement plan," Sharon said. Sharon had decided to tell the so-called disengagement plan to the 200,000 members of the parliament for approval. While not addressing the declining support in surveys, Sharon hinted at parliamentary address that would press for Cabinet and parliamentary approval even if he loses his party vote. Initial had said the Likud referendum would be binding.

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