



Arenas charged with felony gun possession; plea deal likely



Enlarge By Cary Edmondson, US Presswire

Gilbert Arenas was suspended last week by NBA commissioner David Stern.

By **J. Michael Falgout**, USA TODAY

Although Washington Wizards guard Gilbert Arenas was charged with one felony count of carrying a handgun without a license, Thursday's filing signaled a plea deal.

That seemed to be so, with Arenas reaching a deal that could include a jail term much less than the maximum five years, *The Washington Post* reported, citing people close to the case. USA TODAY could not confirm that.

The charge filed in D.C. Superior Court was an "information" document with the U.S. Attorney's Office.

"'Felony information' means there's enough to charge him with something but he's not formally indicted. It can mean the parties are negotiating," said Joseph DiBenedetto, a New York criminal defense attorney who also practices in [Washington, D.C.](#)

Arenas, suspended indefinitely without pay by the NBA on Jan. 6, had an argument with teammate [Javaris Crittenton](#) in December that later escalated in the locker room at the team's [Verizon Center](#). Arenas, 28, who said his actions were a "misguided effort to play a joke," admitted bringing unloaded firearms to the arena. That is a

violation of the NBA's collective bargaining agreement.

Teammates told investigators Crittenton also brought a handgun and loaded it, *ThePost* reported. NBA clubs can terminate players' contracts by invoking the morals clause, although the league said voiding a contract has happened only on drug offenses.

Arenas, in the second of a six-year, \$111 million guaranteed contract, was the team's leading scorer. The Wizards (12-25) are 1-4 without him.

The NBA and Arenas' attorney, Kenneth L. Wainstein, declined to comment. A Wizards statement said they were cooperating with investigators. The U.S. Attorney's Office didn't return calls.

Crittenton's attorney, Peter White, confirmed a search warrant for a gun was executed on his client's Arlington, Va., apartment and that evidence wasn't found or seized.

Crittenton has previously said he did nothing wrong, and his agent, Mark Bartelstein, said his client was there during the apartment search.

"It went as smooth as it could have gone," Bartelstein said.

Even if Arenas avoids a jail sentence, the outcome of the legal process will have profound implications on his future in the NBA and specifically with the Wizards.

NBA commissioner Stern was particularly upset that Arenas repeatedly joked about the matter with reporters and on [Twitter](#) and even pantomimed shooting teammates in a pregame huddle before a game at Philadelphia. Arenas attempted, in public at least, to use a "goof ball" defense, saying he meant no harm and never takes anything seriously. Stern, however, said that Arenas was "not currently fit to take the court" and that the 28-year-old player's conduct will "ultimately result in a substantial suspension, and perhaps worse."

In addition, the Wizards could attempt to invoke the morals clause found in standard NBA contracts and void the remainder of the deal Arenas signed in summer 2008. The players' union would almost certainly contest such a move.

"We will continue to lend our full support to Gilbert and will assist him in every way possible to see this matter through," union executive director [Billy Hunter](#) said.

Arenas has played in only 34 games since signing the contract because of a knee injury and the gun-related suspension.

Arenas was averaging 22.6 points and 7.2 assists this season for the Wizards, who are in last place in the NBA's Southeast Division. The team has removed nearly all traces of the once-marketable "Agent Zero" from the Verizon Center, including Arenas merchandise with the jersey No. 0 and a huge banner with his photo.

The case has proved a major distraction for a troubled team. At least seven Wizards players and coach [Flip Saunders](#) have appeared before a grand jury or been questioned by authorities, leaving the team without enough players to hold a regular practice on some days. Arenas has been told to stay away from team functions during his suspension, and Crittenton, who has not played this season because of a foot injury, has been excused by the team while the legal process plays out.

"We are aware of the charge filed against Gilbert Arenas today and will continue to follow the ongoing legal process very carefully," the Wizards said in a statement. "We will also continue to cooperate fully with the proper authorities and the NBA."

Contributing: [Jeff Zillgitt](#), wire reports

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor [Brent Jones](#). For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Find this article at:
http://www.usatoday.com/sports/basketball/nba/wizards/2010-01-14-arenas-charged_N.htm