

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

# Sprewell's advertising star rises in playoffs

## Troubled player regaining appeal

By Melanie Wells  
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Trouble-prone New York Knicks star Latrell Sprewell is getting renewed interest from Madison Avenue.

AND 1, the basketball shoe and apparel company that signed Sprewell as an endorser after Converse dropped him last year, is putting an additional \$400,000 behind an edgy commercial that features the controversial player. It's one of the few times the company, which had sales of \$60 million in 1998, has advertised on national TV.

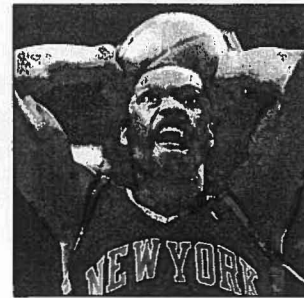
And Sprewell's agent, Robert Gist, says two high-end designers — Calvin

Klein and Hugo Boss — have contacted him to discuss endorsement deals with the National Basketball Association star. At Sprewell's request, those conversations have been put on hold until after the NBA playoffs.

"Do they want him to appear on billboards in jeans or briefs? I don't know. We didn't get that far," Gist says. Sprewell "says he certainly wants to consider it, but not until the season ends."

Calvin Klein didn't return phone calls.

Just 18 months ago, it looked as if the volatile player's endorsement career was dead. Sprewell, then a guard with the Golden State Warriors, was suspended by the NBA for



By Jeff Haynes, Agence France-Presse

**Sprewell:** Takes a shot for the New York Knicks.

a year after he physically assaulted Coach P.J. Carlesimo at a team practice. He was the first NBA player to

have his contract terminated for an offense other than violating the league's drug policies. Shortly after the suspension, Converse dropped Sprewell as an endorser.

"Sprewell, prior to that incident, was a pretty quiet guy," says Converse Senior Vice President James Solomon. "He was a little moody, but that incident was a shock to us."

Solomon says it's unlikely Converse would ever renew ties with Sprewell. Indeed, the company may be shying away from controversial court stars. Solomon says Converse's endorsement deal with former Los Angeles Laker and Chicago Bull Dennis Rodman is finished.

But some marketing experts say memories on Madison Avenue can be short.

"Given his recent track record, I

think an advertiser can feel pretty comfortable that Sprewell isn't going to do something crazy," says Brandon Steiner, who heads Steiner Sports Marketing. "Some people, like Rodman, are time bombs, but Sprewell seems to have his act together. This could be one of the biggest turnarounds in sports marketing."

But Nova Lanktree, founder of Lanktree Sports Celebrity Network, says Sprewell probably never will have appeal for more mainstream advertisers.

"Calvin Klein makes sense," she says. "They haven't exactly followed the rules of advertising. But I would be surprised if Sprewell got a call from McDonald's or Coca-Cola."

"The public's view of the choking incident was not a positive one, and the public are consumers."