Pump and Grind

Loose lips sink biceps

September 1, 1998 By Jay Croft

In a lawsuit over ownership of two popular gay gyms in Atlanta, entrepreneur Darrell “Bill” Lansden was told to pay $27,000 for spreading the word that his former lover and business partner has HIV.

Back in late 1995, Lansden signed a $1.5 million deal that would let his ex-boyfriend, Michael T. Murphy, lease the Mid-City Fitness Center and the Fitness Factory for four years, and then buy them outright. It also prevented Lansden from opening a gym nearby.

But, eventually, Lansden wanted his own gym. He allegedly began to harass Murphy, who feared Lansden hurting his business, foreclosing on the contract and taking the gyms back. So Murphy sued to prevent his ex from doing so, accusing Lansden of threatening to out his HIV status to his insurance provider. He also charged that Lansden pulled four tanning beds out of one of the gyms, as members looked on.

Lansden countersued, and Fulton County Superior Court Judge Bensonetta Tipton Lane let Murphy keep the gyms and lambasted Lansden for “gratuitously announcing to customers, workout partners and others” that Murphy had HIV: “The court finds these unsolicited announcements to be harassment, in appallingly bad taste and shocking to the conscience.” She ordered him to pay for intentional infliction of emotional distress, electrical repairs and punitive damages.

Lansden’s attorney, Charles Hall, said his client “is not the ogre he’s been made out to be.” He said Lansden left only one phone message about insurance on Murphy’s machine and told only one person about Murphy’s HIV.

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