Bryant insisted that the intercourse had been consensual. Observers, nevertheless, predicted that Bryant would never recover from the public humiliation. His squeaky clean public image had been tarnished by the public admission that he had committed adultery against his wife of two years, who had given birth to the couple's first child in January. In fact, he admitted during a police interview following his arrest that he earlier had been involved with yet another woman. The transcript of Bryant's conversation with the police indicates that he was primarily concerned with whether his public image would be damaged and with the reaction of his wife. He initially denied intercourse with the complainant and changed his mind after the investigators informed him that the physical evidence indicated that the two had engaged in intercourse.

Several days following Bryant's arrest, he purchased a $4 million diamond ring for his wife, who supported her husband throughout his legal ordeal. It later was revealed that Bryant had contemplated divorce several months earlier and that, as a result, his wife had been hospitalized and placed on life support. The mere bringing of the sexual assault charge against Bryant resulted in his losing multimillion-dollar endorsements with leading American corporations.

The alleged victim worked at the front desk at a spa located in a small mountain town one hundred miles west of Denver where Bryant was staying while preparing for knee surgery at a nearby clinic. Bryant invited her to his room. She initially alleged that he immediately assaulted her and then later indicated that Bryant unexpectedly escalated a consensual encounter and that she had cried and at least twice said "no" as he pushed her over a chair and entered her from the rear.

The media quickly shifted the focus from Bryant to the unnamed victim, whose name later was mistakenly posted on an Eagle County court Web site. Press reports indicated that she was a former high school cheerleader who reportedly had auditioned for the show *American Idol* and was described by some acquaintances as desperate for attention and notoriety. Other sources told of two suicide attempts during the past year and her hospitalization by the University of Northern Colorado campus police, who feared that she posed a "danger to herself." The media interviewed every resident of the victim's hometown who was willing to speak, leading to a blizzard of supportive as well as skeptical comments. Two Lakers fans were sufficiently upset to issue death threats against the complainant, resulting in their imprisonment.

Documents and testimony from closed court hearings were leaked to the press. This information indicated that the complainant had sexual intercourse with at least one other individual after she left Bryant and before she contacted the police. The judge would later rule that the defense was entitled to introduce evidence of the complainant's sexual activity during the three days prior to her hospital examination on July 1, 2003, on the grounds that this was relevant to the cause of her injuries, the source of DNA, and her credibility as a witness. Information was also leaked documenting that she received a substantial amount of money from a state victim compensation fund to address mental health concerns stemming from her alleged sexual assault by Bryant.

The news stories on Bryant marveled over the fact that he was able to attend court hearings and then fly hundreds of miles to Lakers games and still perform at a high level. Speculation focused on whether Bryant would continue to play with the Lakers when his contract expired. This question was answered several months prior to the dismissal of the charges, when Bryant signed a seven-year contract for more than $136.4 million.

Following the dismissal of the charges against Bryant, fans expressed relief, and the Lakers issued a statement of support. Bryant circulated a press release in which he recognized that although he viewed the affair as consensual, "she did not," and he issued an apology to the complainant and her family for his behavior. Advocates for victims of sexual assault were quoted as bemoaning that the Bryant case would have the impact of discouraging women from bringing complaints of rape to prosecutors who, in turn, would be reluctant to file charges.

In 2016, Bryant retired from the NBA having played on five championship teams and having earned an Olympic gold medal. Even his harshest critics rank him as an all-time great player.

As a prosecutor, would you have brought the Bryant case to trial? Do athletes receive preferential treatment when accused of sexual abuse? On the other hand, are they more often than not the target of false allegations?