

Judge releases Johnston

Boxer agrees to pay some overdue child support

By **Brian D. Crecente**

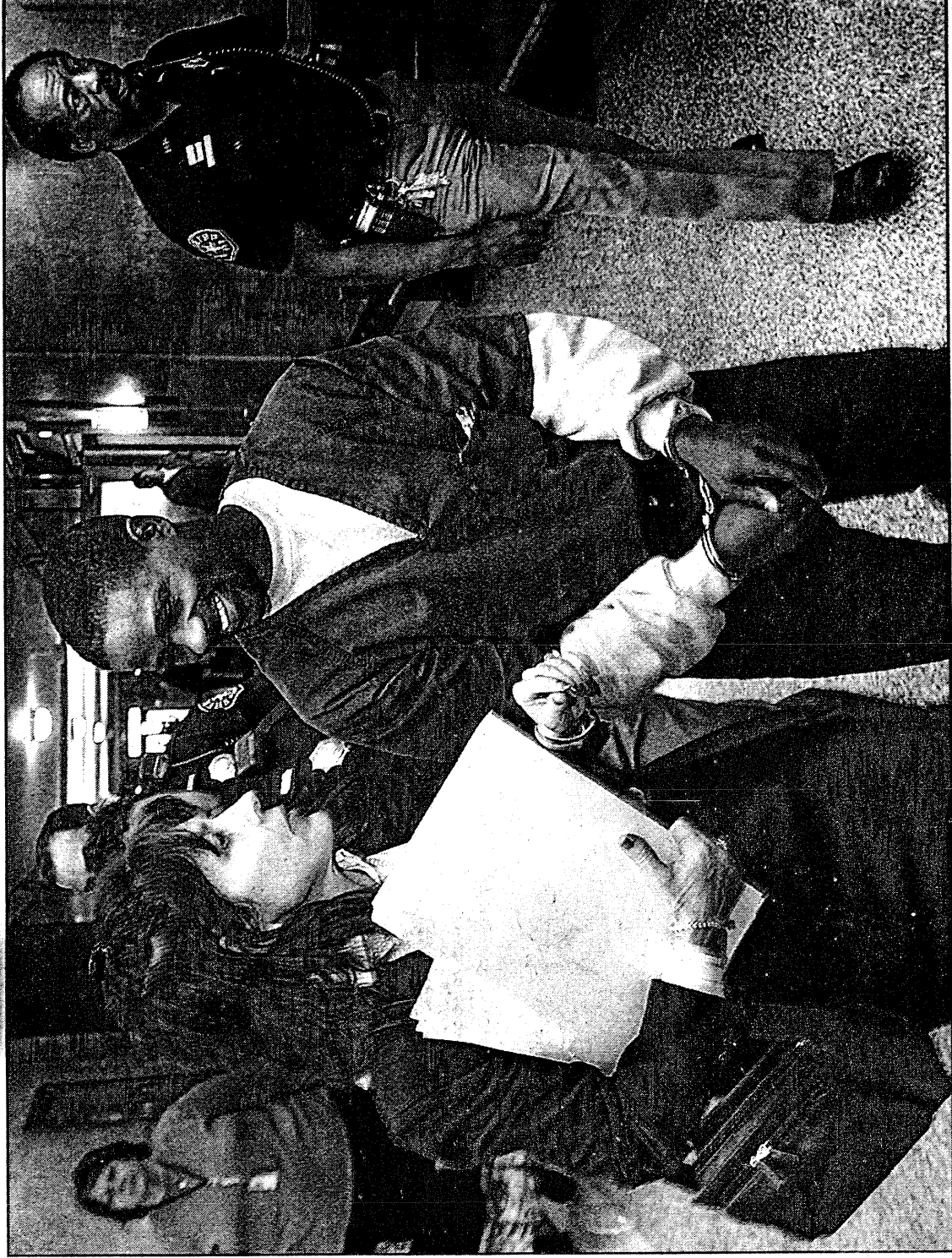
News Staff Writer

Boxer Stevie Johnston will be released from Denver jail so he can train for his Las Vegas showdown with Alejandro Gonzalez, a judge ruled Tuesday, after the fighter agreed to use some of his winnings to help pay overdue child support.

The former lightweight world champion was sentenced to jail March 25 for contempt of court after failing to pay three women, mothers of four of his children, \$136,000 in child support over an 18-month period.

While in Denver jail, Johnston, 29, was classified as a "trustee," but wasn't scheduled for release until May 18. The boxing match is set for April 20.

At a court hearing Tuesday, Johnston agreed to pay the three women an undisclosed sum of money immediately and hand over a chunk of his purse from his fight, which will be televised by HBO. A source said Johnston's share of



Attorney Sharon Liko, left, talks with client Stevie Johnston on Tuesday afternoon as they walk down the hall at the City and County Building on their way to a court hearing that resulted in his release from jail so he can prepare for an April 20 bout.

Steven G. Smith/Rocky Mountain

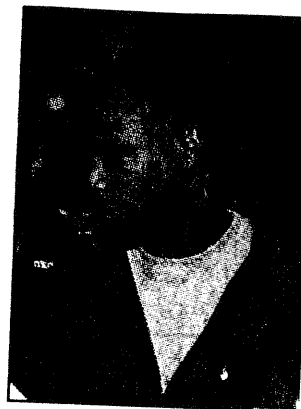
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Denver's Stevie Johnston agrees to pay owed child support to gain jail release and fight April 20.

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the purse will be \$70,000.

In exchange, Denver Juvenile Court Judge Orrelle R. Weeks ordered Johnston to be released early this morning.

"This is a big fight for him, and sitting in jail isn't going to help his career — it basically ends it," said Sharon Liko, Johnston's attorney. "And if he can't fight, he can't make money to pay his child support."

Liko says she also filed a motion to reduce Johnston's \$7,400-a-month child-support payments, arguing that that figure was based on an income the fighter is no longer making.

The three women were mixed in their feelings about Johnston's release.

"He's going to make good on the money he owes us," said Latasha Hall, who has a 10-year-old son by Johnston. "I feel good about what went on in there."

Ebony Gray, who has a 7-year-old daughter by Johnston, said keeping the fighter in jail didn't help anyone.

"I don't want to see him go to jail," she said. "If he's in jail he can't take care of the kids."

But Lanese Thomas, who has a 11-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son by Johnston, said that though the mothers would be getting some money soon, the arrangement meant he didn't have to pay the full \$136,000.

"I'm not really happy with this, but I guess I have to take what I can get," she said.

Vivian Johnston, the fighter's current wife and mother of two more of his children, declined to comment.

Johnston arrived at the court surrounded by five deputies and wearing handcuffs and manacles. He left about an hour later, cloaked by the black leather jacket of his trainer. He refused to

comment.

Liko said Johnston was served with additional summonses dealing with child support while in the hearing, but would not elaborate.

With a record of 33-2-1 with 16 knockouts, Johnston is ranked second in World Boxing Council lightweight standings. He won his first championship title in March 1997 and held it until June 2000.

He has been fighting in small venues since, working his way toward the April 20 showdown with Gonzalez of Mexico at the Las Vegas MGM Grand.

Liko said the release from jail was just in time for her client.

"Basically he was really behind the 8-ball," she said. "He needed to be out right now, training 13 hours a day, seven days a week."

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