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Trump Lawyer Tacopina Has a Lot in Common With Client

- Lawyer takes charge of Trump's civil, criminal cases
- Tacopina led his college hockey team in penalty minutes



Joe Tacopina, right, at Trump's arraignment in New York on April 4 over hush money payments in a separate, criminal case. *Photographer: Curtis Means/DailyMail.com/Bloomberg*

By [Patricia Hurtado](#)

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Joe Tacopina is a brash New Yorker with a fondness for the camera and a penchant for in-your-face remarks – much like his latest client, Donald Trump.

During his almost 30 years as a New York trial lawyer, Tacopina has had a roster of A-list clients including former New York Yankees star Alex Rodriguez, rapper Meek Mill and Rihanna’s husband, rapper A\$AP Rocky.

Now it’s Trump’s turn. Tacopina gave the opening statement Tuesday in the trial of the former president, who is accused of defamation and sexual assault by writer E. Jean Carroll. He told jurors in Manhattan federal court that Carroll “hated Donald Trump” and fabricated the rape allegation along with two friends she plans to call as witnesses.

“The absurdities of their stories and the inconsistencies within them will reveal their lies and their true intentions,” Tacopina said. “They schemed to hurt Donald Trump politically.”

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But he also acknowledged that many, including possibly members of the jury, have strong feelings about Trump. “You can hate Donald Trump,” Tacopina said. “It’s okay. But there is a time and a secret place for that, for you to express those feelings. It’s called a ballot box.”

When Trump hired Tacopina in January, the former president had not yet been indicted by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg. Tacopina said he told Trump he’d handle the Carroll suit, which at the time was the most pressing concern.

“I told them I’m not doing five cases at once, but the first big case to go to trial,” Tacopina said in an interview. “When the federal case is finished, I will then pitch in.”

He didn’t wait. Before the Carroll trial got underway, Tacopina was next to Trump when the former president pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments to adult-film star Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal adult film to keep their alleged sexual encounters with Trump secret before the 2016 election. He’s also been a regular on TV defending the former president.

[Read more: Trump Pleads Not Guilty in NY Case Tying Hush Money to Election](#)

“This case is every defense lawyer’s dream,” Tacopina said. “I’ve got a firm of six, not 100, but I’m totally committed.”

Tacopina, 57, has some unexpected fans. Lanny Davis, the veteran lawyer represents Trump’s former fixer Michael Cohen, who promises to be one of the prosecution’s star witness against the former president, is one. But Davis praised Tacopina in an interview.

“Joe is a strong advocate, but he doesn’t play with adjective and attack words, he does facts,” said Davis, who’s been friends with Tacopina since they both defended Rodriguez as he fought Major League Baseball over allegations he used steroids. “He’s the kind of lawyer who’s very effective when he speaks and communicates to a jury.”

Davis said Tacopina won’t have an easy time defending Trump in his criminal trial though.

“No jury is going to believe Donald Trump is not a philanderer and nobody will believe he did not have an affair with Stormy Daniels.”

Tacopina’s first shot at swaying a jury is Carroll’s case, before US District Judge Lewis Kaplan. She claims Trump raped her in a Bergdorf Goodman dressing room in the 1990s. Trump says it never happened, and said Carroll’s not his type. She alleges he also defamed her.

[Read more: Trump Trial for Rape Suit Renews Focus on Treatment of Women](#)

Tacopina told jurors on Tuesday that Carroll used to allegations to make her famous, “She became a celebrity and loved every minute of it,” he said.

The last time Tacopina appeared before Kaplan, he represented a New York police officer who sued the city claiming she was harassed by colleagues and superiors after she married another female officer.

Kaplan sharply rebuked the NYPD, saying it was “outrageous” it had violated federal policy by not investigating the officer’s claims. She settled in the middle of the trial and Tacopina said he was “ecstatic” with the results.

But Tacopina is getting a cooler reception from Kaplan this time. The judge rejected many of his requests, including a trial delay because of negative publicity from the former president’s indictment. Kaplan denied that, noting much of the bad publicity Trump complained about “was of his own doing” and his incendiary comments on social media.

Raised in blue-collar Brooklyn to Italian immigrants, Tacopina’s competitive edge was evident when, as captain of his college’s hockey team, he held the school record for most career penalty minutes. The New York Islanders scouted him, but he went to law school instead.



Joe Tacopina outside court in New York on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. *Photographer: Alex Kent/Bloomberg*

He’s also not your typical New York lawyer. Tacopina was honored in 2019 by the Associazione Cavaliere di San Marco, a group in Venice for his “good works” as owner at the time of the Venezia FC soccer team.

Tacopina's love of soccer led him to buy stakes in several Italian teams, eventually selling his Maserati and a yacht to raise funds to be part of a group which bought AS Roma in 2011. He currently owns Italian soccer club SPAL. He's met with success in the sport, with Forbes Magazine dubbing him "Italian Soccer's Most Experienced American Owner" in 2021.

After getting his law degree from Bridgeport Law School in Connecticut, Tacopina worked for criminal defense lawyer Bruce Cutler. He was defending Mafia crime boss John Gotti, who was charged with ordering the shooting of a union official.

"I was the wiretap guy," Tacopina said proudly of his role behind the scenes. A Manhattan jury acquitted Gotti, helping him earn the moniker of "the Teflon Don."

Tacopina then joined the Brooklyn District Attorney's office where he said he won 39 of 40 trials. As a defense lawyer, he's won a streak of acquittals many thought were impossible.

Arthur Aidala, a criminal defense lawyer who's known Tacopina since high school, praised his ability to connect with jurors.

"He has the ability to tell jurors, 'I'm one of you, I'm not going to mislead you,' and jurors identify with him," said Aidala.

– *With assistance by Erik Larson*

(Updates with opening statements in fourth and fifth paragraphs. A previous version of this story corrected a misspelling of Tacopina's name in photo caption.)