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SC Court of Appeals

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM WILLIAMSBURG COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

The Honorable Maite Murphy, Circuit Court Judge

Case No. 2014-CP-45-377

Lauren Goodman,

Respondent,

v.

Willie Marion Brown,

Appellant.

BRIEF OF APPELLANT

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STATEMENT OF ISSUES ON APPEAL

- I. DID THE TRIAL COURT ERR IN GRANTING SUMMARY JUDGMENT ON THE ISSUE OF WHETHER, UNDER THE DOCTRINE OF COLLATERAL ESTOPPEL, A GUILTY VERDICT AGAINST APPELLANT IN A RELATED CRIMINAL PROCEEDING IS CONCLUSIVE ON THE ISSUE OF APPELLANT'S LIABILITY TO RESPONDENT IN THE PENDING CIVIL PROCEEDING WHEN THE CRIMINAL PROCEEDING IS ON APPEAL?

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This case is a civil action which was filed by Respondent Lauren Goodman (“Goodman”) on July 28, 2014. In her Complaint, Goodman alleges that Appellant Willie Marion Brown (“Brown”) committed certain sexual acts against Goodman between April 20, 2002 and January 26, 2006, while Goodman was a minor. (R. p. 11, ¶¶ 8-10). Goodman claims she was injured as a result of these alleged acts, and she seeks an unspecified amount of actual and punitive damages. (R. p. 12, ¶¶ 15, 19; R. p. 13, ¶ 23; R. p. 14, ¶¶ 28, 31, 33).

By way of background, on October 25, 2012, Brown was indicted on two counts of first degree criminal sexual conduct with Goodman and one count of committing a lewd act on Goodman. (R. p. 23). Brown pleaded not guilty, and a jury trial was held in the Williamsburg County Court of General Sessions beginning May 20, 2014. On May 23, 2014, the jury returned a verdict finding Brown guilty on each charge. (R. p. 57, line 20 - p. 58, line 6). The trial court sentenced Brown to thirty-five years imprisonment for the CSC counts and fifteen years for the lewd act count, with all sentences to run concurrently. (R. pp. 24-26). A judgment to this effect was entered on May 23, 2014.¹ Brown filed a notice of appeal of his conviction on August 1, 2014. (R. p. 59).

The pending civil action against Brown arises out of the same allegations of sexual assault that were presented in the criminal trial. (R. p. 11, ¶¶ 8-10). After the criminal appeal was filed, on October 8, 2014, Goodman filed a motion for summary judgment in the civil matter, arguing that pursuant to the doctrine of collateral estoppel, Brown’s convictions in the

¹ Brown filed a motion for reconsideration of the sentence on June 2, 2014, and in a July 21, 2014 order, the trial court reduced Brown’s sentence to twenty-eight years imprisonment for the CSC counts and fifteen years for the lewd act count, with all sentences to run concurrently.

related criminal matter were conclusive in the pending civil action because the underlying facts and issues of both matters were the same, the issues were actually litigated and determined by a valid and final judgment, and Brown had a full and fair opportunity to litigate these issues in the criminal matter. (R. pp. 29-30). Brown filed a response in opposition to the motion for summary judgment on October 23, 2014. (R. pp. 32-35).

The trial court held a hearing on the motion on October 30, 2014 at the Williamsburg County Courthouse in Kingstree, South Carolina. Thereafter the trial court issued an Order granting Goodman's motion for summary judgment, which was filed on December 17, 2014. (R. p. 2). On January 12, 2015, Brown filed a timely motion for reconsideration pursuant to Rule 59(e), SCRPC. (R. pp. 36-42). On February 13, 2015 the trial court issued a Form 4 Order which denied Brown's motion for reconsideration. (R. p. 5). Brown received written notice of entry of this order on or about February 19, 2015. Subsequently, Brown served a timely notice of appeal from the denial of the motion for reconsideration on March 4, 2015.

ARGUMENT

I. THE TRIAL COURT ERRED IN GRANTING SUMMARY JUDGMENT BECAUSE THE ISSUE OF WHETHER, UNDER THE DOCTRINE OF COLLATERAL ESTOPPEL, A GUILTY VERDICT AGAINST BROWN IN A RELATED CRIMINAL PROCEEDING IS CONCLUSIVE ON THE ISSUE OF BROWN'S LIABILITY TO GOODMAN IN THE PENDING CIVIL PROCEEDING IS NOT RIPE FOR CONSIDERATION.

As noted in the trial court's December 12, 2014 order, "[u]nder the doctrine of collateral estoppel, also known as issue preclusion, when an issue has been actually litigated and determined by a valid and final judgment, the determination is conclusive in a subsequent action whether on the same or different claim." (R. p. 2). Although this is a correct statement of the law, this issue is not ripe for consideration in this case because the judgment in Brown's

criminal matter is not “final”, as an appeal of the criminal convictions is pending in the South Carolina Court of Appeals. (R. p. 59). After an exhaustive review of the case law in South Carolina, it appears that none of the appellate courts in our state have decided the precise issue of whether collateral estoppel applies in a subsequent civil proceeding when a criminal conviction is under review. Moreover, Doe v. Doe, 346 S.C. 145, 551 S.E.2d 257 (2001), which Goodman cites in support of her motion for summary judgment, provides no guidance on this issue because the Doe case was decided following the appellate court’s denial of the defendant Doe’s appeal of his criminal convictions.²

The issue of whether collateral estoppel applies in a subsequent civil proceeding when a criminal conviction is under appellate review is a novel issue in South Carolina; nevertheless, persuasive authority from the Restatement (Second) of Judgments and other jurisdictions support reversal of summary judgment. The Restatement (Second) of Judgments, upon which the appellate courts of this state have historically relied, states in part:

The pendency of a motion for new trial or to set aside a judgment, or of an appeal from a judgment, is relevant in deciding whether the question of preclusion should be presently decided in the second action. It may be appropriate to postpone decision of that question until the proceedings addressed to the judgment are concluded.

Restatement (Second) of Judgments §13, cmt. f (1982).³ Additionally, state courts in other

² Notably, Goodman’s counsel stated at the October 30, 2014 hearing that the Supreme Court in Doe “adopted the rule that once a person has been criminally convicted *and exhausted all appellate remedies* or means of post-conviction relief, he is bound.” (R. p. 48) (emphasis added). This statement actually supports Brown’s position on this issue.

³ In S.C. Prop. and Cas. Ins. Guar. Assoc. v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 304 S.C. 210, 403 S.E.2d 625 (1991), the South Carolina Court of Appeals adopted the doctrine of collateral estoppel formulated by the American Law Institute in the Restatement (Second) of Judgments. It logically follows that comment f of section 13 of the Restatement (Second) of Judgments would provide guidance on the issue as to whether a pending appeal of a judgment precludes the use

jurisdictions have held that a pending appeal prevents a prior judgment from constituting a final judgment for purposes of issue preclusion (collateral estoppel). See Manco Contracting Co. (W.W.L.) v. Bezdikian, 195 P.3d 604, 611 (Cal. 2008) (“[A] judgment is not final and conclusive between the parties when it is on appeal.”); Rantz v. Kaufman, 109 P.3d 132, 141 (Col. 2005) (citing Colorado law that a pending appeal prevents a prior judgment from constituting a final judgment for purposes of issue preclusion); Grider v. USX Corp., 847 P.2d 779, 784 (Okl. 1993) (“[A] final adjudication is either one in which no appeal has been taken and the time for appeal has run or one in which an appeal has been filed and acted upon by the appellate court.”); Ark. Best Freight System, Inc. v. H.H. Moore, Jr. Trucking Co., Inc., 421 S.E.2d 197, 199 (Va. 1992) (“[A] judgment, to be relied upon for the application of the doctrine of *res judicata*, must be final, and a judgment which is being appealed is not final for *res judicata* purposes.”) (citations omitted); Cups Coal Co., Inc. v. Tenn. River Pulp & Paper Co., 519 So.2d 932, 934 (Ala. 1988) (“Although a prior criminal conviction can be used in a subsequent civil suit arising out of the same transaction as substantive, though not conclusive, evidence that the acts underlying the crime were committed, such a conviction is inadmissible as substantive evidence if an appeal of the conviction is pending.”) (citations omitted); CS-Lakeview at Gwinnett, Inc. v. Retail Dev. Partners, et al., 602 S.E.2d 140, 142 (Ct. App. Ga. 2004) (“Under Georgia law, the fact that a prior court judgment has been appealed suspends the operation of any preclusive effect pending appeal.”). Based upon persuasive authority, Brown posits that until his pending criminal appeal has been decided, there is no final judgment for which collateral estoppel would apply in this civil action.

collateral estoppel in a subsequent proceeding.

Finally, if the trial court's order granting summary judgment stands, and an appellate court subsequently grants Brown's criminal appeal and his convictions are overturned, he will have already been required to pay a considerable amount of monetary damages to Goodman in this case. In that scenario, Brown will be unduly prejudiced because he will have already paid a judgment on the civil claims before a final determination is made as to his guilt in the criminal proceeding. Furthermore, the time and resources of the court will be wasted in having to go back and relitigate the issue of liability in the civil case. For all intents and purposes, it may even be too late at that point to "unring the bell." On the other hand, if the this Court reverses summary judgment, there is no harm to either of the parties. As to Brown, he would be able to respond to the allegations regarding civil liability for sexual abuse while his criminal appeal is pending, and as to the Goodman, she could proceed with discovery to provide support for her civil allegations, and in the event an appellate courts denies Brown's criminal appeal, Goodman could revisit the issue of collateral estoppel with the trial court.


CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, the Appellant, Willie Marion Brown, respectfully requests that this Court reverse the trial court's Order granting the Respondent's motion for summary judgment.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL

The undersigned certifies that this Final Brief complies with Rule 211(b), SCACR.

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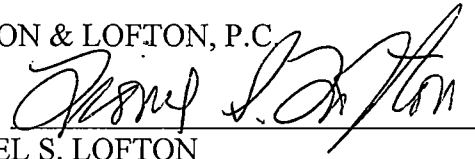
PROOF OF SERVICE

I certify that I have served the Final Brief on Respondent by depositing a copy of it in the United States Mail, postage prepaid, on August 14, 2015, addressed to her attorney of record, Steven S. McKenzie, Coffee, Chandler & McKenzie, P.A., P.O. Box 1292, Manning, South Carolina 29102.

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