

Miura hangs himself upon return to L.A.

Death of 'Japanese O.J.' stuns supporters, lawyers, media

Compiled from Kyodo, AP

LOS ANGELES — Japanese businessman Kazuyoshi Miura, who was brought to Los Angeles on Friday to face a conspiracy charge in the mysterious shooting of his wife there in 1981, has committed suicide, his supporters said Saturday.

Miura hanged himself while in detention at around 10 p.m. local time after arriving in Los Angeles early in the morning from Saipan via Honolulu, they said, adding that they were told by his family.

According to police sources, Miura, who was alone in the cell, hanged himself using his T-shirt after guards left him alone for 20 minutes.

After the guards found him hanging, they rushed him to a hospital but he was soon pronounced dead.

The Foreign Ministry later confirmed Miura's death.

With the passing of Miura, who was dubbed "Japan's O.J. Simpson," the truth behind one of Japan's most sensational murder cases will remain a mystery.

"I'm shocked," Miura's attorney Mark Geragos said



Return to L.A.: Kazuyoshi Miura arrives early Friday in Los Angeles escorted by Los Angeles Police Department investigator Rick Jackson. Miura, who was to be arraigned Tuesday on a charge of conspiracy in the fatal 1981 shooting of his wife, committed suicide the same day. KYODO PHOTO

over the phone from Italy. "One of my lawyers was with him for 12 hours yesterday and he seemed in good spirits. He was looking forward to fighting this."

Geragos said he contacted the Japanese consulate and requested that Miura's current wife be notified.

"She was on her way to Los Angeles and was to meet with me on Wednesday," he said.

The Los Angeles Police Department was to release the details of the incident later.

Miura was due to appear at a Los Angeles court Tuesday to be arraigned on a charge of conspiracy to commit murder, after months fighting extradition from Saipan.

Miura and his 28-year-old wife Kazumi were shot in a Los Angeles parking lot on Nov. 18, 1981, in what appeared to be a robbery. He was shot in the leg and she in the head.

Kazumi Miura was returned to Japan by the U.S. Air Force but died in a hospital after a year in a coma. The case became notorious and reinforced Japanese perceptions that the United States was a violent country.

But a series of Japanese media reports in 1984 started to change public perceptions of the case after a former mistress of Miura's said he had asked her to kill his wife three months before the shooting.

For his part in the assault, Miura was convicted of attempted murder in 1987 by the Tokyo District Court. His six-year prison term was eventually finalized in 1998.

In 1988, however, Miura was separately indicted for Kazumi's murder. Although the Tokyo District Court sentenced him to life in prison in 1994, he was acquitted by the Tokyo High Court in 1998. The decision was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2003.

U.S. Judge Steven Van Sicklen ruled last month that Miura could only be tried for conspiracy in California because double jeopardy rules prevent him from

being tried twice for the same crime.

But prosecutors in Los Angeles on Thursday said they would try to reinstate the murder charge in a challenge to Van Sicklen's ruling.

Detectives with the LAPD said that they supported the prosecutors' moves.

The Japanese investigators in Miura's case were surprised by his suicide.

"I wonder if Miura thought he was checkmated under the U.S. justice system, which is stricter than Japan's," said former detective Yasuhiro Oomine, 60.

"I never thought he would kill himself," said Tsutomu Sakaguchi, 73, who led the investigation. "He wasn't the type to do that."

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