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Mario Batali Charged With Assault and Battery in 2017 Case

By Jacey Fortin and Karen Zraick

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The celebrity chef Mario Batali, who built a formidable restaurant empire before retreating amid accusations of sexual harassment by several women, has been charged with indecent assault and battery stemming from an allegation that he groped and kissed a woman at a Boston restaurant in 2017.

Mr. Batali, 58, is to be arraigned in Boston on Friday, according to court documents. If convicted, he could face up to five years in prison and be required to register as a sex offender.

The criminal complaint was filed last month, and it said that a woman had told the police that Mr. Batali kissed her and groped her chest and groin at a Boston restaurant two years ago.

According to the complaint, the woman was eating dinner with a friend at Towne Stove and Spirits, a bar in Boston's Back Bay neighborhood that has since closed, when she spotted Mr. Batali sitting nearby.

Mr. Batali had observed her taking a photo of him with her phone, and told her to "come here right now," the complaint said. She went over to apologize and to tell him she would erase it, she told the police, but instead, he offered to take a selfie with her — and grabbed her as they posed.

The complaint matched an allegation made by Natali Tene, who filed a lawsuit against Mr. Batali in August.

In a statement on Thursday, Ms. Tene's lawyers said that she was grateful that the charge had been filed. The lawyers, Eric M. Baum and Matthew J. Fogelman, said that Mr. Batali should be held accountable "criminally and civilly" for his actions.

A lawyer for Mr. Batali, Anthony E. Fuller, disputed Ms. Tene's account.

"Mr. Batali denies the allegations in both this criminal complaint and the civil complaint filed last August," Mr. Fuller said in a statement to The New York Times on Wednesday. "The charges, brought by the same individual without any new basis, are without merit. He intends to fight the allegations vigorously and we expect the outcome to fully vindicate Mr. Batali."

Last year, three other women also told the police in New York that Mr. Batali had sexually assaulted them years earlier at two Manhattan restaurants where he was an owner or an investor. But a New York Police Department official confirmed in January that it had closed those investigations because of a lack of evidence and limits imposed by the statute of limitations.

Of the several famous chefs and restaurateurs to have been accused of sexual harassment, Mr. Batali was the first to surrender all of his restaurants; his former business partners bought the shares he used to own at his hospitality company in March. Mr. Batali also sold his shares in Eataly, the fast-growing global chain of luxury Italian supermarkets.

That came more than a year after Mr. Batali had stepped away from the daily operations of his restaurants, and from “The Chew,” a daytime television show he co-hosted on ABC.

At its peak, Mr. Batali’s empire encompassed dozens of restaurants and food businesses in the United States, Singapore, Italy and Hong Kong. Splashy restaurants like Babbo and Del Posto made celebrities of Mr. Batali and the Bastianich family of restaurateurs he often partnered with.

But in December 2017, a report was published on Eater, the food website, that said four women had alleged that Mr. Batali touched them inappropriately in a pattern of behavior that seemed to span decades. Three of the women had worked for Mr. Batali, and the fourth worked in the restaurant industry, Eater reported.

In response, Mr. Batali apologized. “Although the identities of most of the individuals mentioned in these stories have not been revealed to me, much of the behavior described does, in fact, match up with ways I have acted,” he said. “That behavior was wrong and there are no excuses.”

Kate Taylor contributed reporting.

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