

Teens Take Stand in Jeschke Trial

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By Ben Preston

After a rigorous jury selection hearing earlier this week, Peter Jeschke - the former Santa Barbara High School tennis coach accused of supplying drugs and alcohol to minors and having sex with one of the players on the team - was in Judge Frank Ochoa's courtroom today for opening statements in his trial. The alleged crimes occurred in the fall of 2007, when most of the minors described by Deputy District Attorney Joyce Dudley were between 14 and 16 years old.

The most graphic part of Dudley's opening statement was centered around Jeschke's alleged sex acts with one particular player on the team who was 16 years old at the time. "The evidence will show that he engaged in predatory acts," she said. Jeschke's defense attorney, Lara Yeretsian, from the Los Angeles-based Geragos & Geragos law firm, asked the jury to think of the trial as a jigsaw puzzle, saying that her pieces are still coming in. Yeretsian placed emphasis on a diary that she said Jeschke's alleged victim had destroyed, creating the one used in the investigation that only included dates and events that were coincidentally the same as those examined by law enforcement.



Paul Wellman

Peter Jeschke

According to the investigation conducted by the Santa Barbara Police Department - which Dudley said was based upon testimony, phone calls, text messages, and little if any physical evidence - the events leading to Jeschke's December 14, 2007, arrest began in October of that year, when he took three players to Disneyland for a tennis tournament. Interviews Detective Jim Ella conducted with the girls on December 20, 2007, indicated that Jeschke bought and offered them alcohol, which they said consisted of a mimosa at breakfast, and a six-pack of beer and two mini-bottles of hard liquor later on in the day. "He said if I won my match, we'd all get hammered," testified one of the teens after opening statements had been offered.



The two girls who testified on Thursday, both of whom are now 16, said that Jeschke had been flirtatious with the girl he was accused of later having sex with. "He said she had the best body on the tennis team," one of them said, offering that during their October 2007 Disneyland trip, Jeschke had put his arm around her and slapped her buttocks a couple of times.

What happened next has not yet been covered by witness testimony in court, which on Thursday focused on the Disneyland trip, but Dudley outlined the police investigation, which showed a timeline based upon previously gathered interviews and witness testimony. According to the report compiled by law enforcement officials, the girl Jeschke was allegedly flirtatious with made regular trips to his house to drop off the checks her parents wrote for private lessons she was taking from him. (Jeschke also gave private lessons to several other members of the team.) On one occasion, he allegedly pointed out that they were flirting with one another, but that he had to wait until she was 18 to do anything about it. The report said that the next few times they met, he gave her wine, performing oral sex and penetrating her vagina with his fingers. On November 21, 2007, the girl reportedly came to his East Pueblo Street residence, where he gave her marijuana and had unprotected sexual intercourse with her. The report continued that she came over the day after Thanksgiving, used marijuana and ecstasy given to her by Jeschke, and had unprotected sexual intercourse with him again. When her parents called a short time later, he allegedly gave her

two lines of cocaine to wake her up so that she could drive home.

While the report said that Jeschke repeatedly requested that the girl keep quiet about their activities, she eventually told a friend when she became worried about having potentially contracted an STD or become pregnant. Even then, she kept the information away from her parents, who didn't find out until the friend told school administrators at Santa Barbara High School. The school's principal, Dr. Mark Capritto, called Jeschke to ask him if what the girl had told him was true, which the report said he denied. Jeschke then called one of the girls to ask her and her friends not to say anything to school officials, but with Capritto still in the room with them, the girls had put Jeschke on speaker phone so that Capritto could hear what was being said. Police then had the girl Jeschke had allegedly had sex with call him on what they termed a pretext call - she asked him a series of questions about what had happened to get him to admit to having performed the acts he was accused of. Police arrested Jeschke later that day.

Today, two of the girls from the tennis team who had Jeschke as a private instructor and a high school coach, and had been on the October 2007 Disneyland trip with him took the stand. Both appeared uncomfortable, and began crying at certain points in their testimonies, expressing disappointment in their former coach. When asked how she felt about Jeschke, one of the girls said, through tearful eyes, "I like him. He's my coach; he's like a big brother. I still like him."