

Jeschke Trial Closes

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By Ben Preston

After a trial lasting two weeks, defense and prosecution teams gave their closing arguments regarding the Peter Jeschke case on Thursday afternoon. Jeschke, the former Santa Barbara High School assistant tennis coach charged with 11 felony counts — including giving drugs and alcohol to teens on the team, and also having sex with one of them — has been out on bail since his December 14th, 2007 arrest. Although there was no physical evidence in the case, countless police interviews and testimonies, and a tape of phone calls between Jeschke and the girl were offered in support of the allegations. Throughout the trial, Jeschke's defense team has focused upon what they said were discrepancies between the statements given by witnesses in multiple interviews with police, and those given in testimony during the trial. The prosecution, however, pointed out that when witnesses and suspects are initially interviewed by police in what is known as a prima facie interview, only a limited amount of information is gathered in order to secure an arrest warrant.

Opening her statements with a recollection of a childhood fear of anteaters, Senior Deputy District Attorney Joyce Dudley compared Jeschke to a natural predator, in particular the polar bear, the world's number three predator. "How can a polar bear be a predator? They're pretty, playful, and protected," she said, offering to jurors that Jeschke was the same, using his youthful looks and gregarious personality to take advantage of teens. "Multiple children protected him to the point of losing friends, lying, destroying evidence, and breaking the law," she said, noting a 19 year old girl who had testified — after being arrested at UCLA, where she goes to school — that Jeschke had contacted her several times in the days leading up to the trial asking her to convince key teen witnesses to change their stories or not testify. The girl's 18 year old brother also testified that Jeschke called him, although he said he refused to cooperate. His sister, however, said that she had agreed to help him, creating a fake Facebook account to send threatening messages to the teen Jeschke allegedly had sex with and to others who were to testify the next day.

Beginning her statements theatrically, defense attorney Lara Yeretsian attacked Dudley for calling in too many teen witnesses to testify, thereby traumatizing the youths. This seemed to be a response to Dudley's assertion that she had confused the teens with her "confusing, hostile, repetitive, and relentless questions." "The prosecution wants to distract you from the facts. They want to convince you that [Jeschke] is such a bad person that it doesn't matter that there were inconsistencies," said Yeretsian, challenging the jury to weigh all of the facts while deciding Jeschke's fate. The diary which the alleged victim said she had destroyed was also brought up, as were the taped phone calls, which Yeretsian said were not definitive evidence of Jeschke's guilt. Having accused Dudley of character assassination of her client, Yeretsian proceeded to question the character of several of the teen girls who had testified, suggesting that they were going after Jeschke over anger or jealousy.



Paul Wellman

Peter Jeschke

Disparities in testimonies of the two drug experts — UCLA researcher Ronald Siegel and Santa Barbara Police Sergeant Todd Johnson — were brought up by both teams. Siegel said that based upon his research and expertise, there was no way that the drugs Jeschke allegedly gave to the teen girl before they had sex could have been cocaine and ecstasy, while Johnson stated that his experience as a field police officer indicated that, based upon her testimony and the descriptions friends had given of her behavior at that time, she had in fact taken



those particular drugs. Dudley called Siegel's testimony — in which he made statements such as, "everyone needs antidepressants," and offered that subjects of his studies who injected cocaine had ejaculated immediately — "flippant, arrogant, defensive, argumentative, and self-promoting." Yeretsian objected to the omission of dates in witness interviews with police, but Dudley stated that witnesses often don't recall dates upon first interview. "When someone has their mouth on your vagina and you're being digitally penetrated, you're not thinking, 'I wonder what date it is?'" said Dudley.

Softening her tone to a melancholy whisper, Yeretsian closed her comments by calling the jurors to remember the teen girls as, one by one, they left the stand weeping. "They cried because they didn't want to testify against him. They still adore him," she said, as two of the teen witnesses who happened to be sitting in the gallery exchanged looks of disbelief.

Jury deliberations began on Friday afternoon, and are scheduled to resume this morning.