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Jerry Sandusky trial: Old friends say showers with boys routine, harmless

BELLEFONTE, Pa. — Jerry Sandusky's attorneys opened their client's defense Monday morning by calling to the stand two former coaching colleagues who said that it was routine for adults and boys to shower together in locker rooms.

Richard Anderson, a college teammate and Penn State coaching colleague of Sandusky's, was the first to testify, and he vouched for the defendant's "wonderful" reputation. Then, when asked by prosecutor Joseph McGettigan III if he'd seen Sandusky showering with boys, Anderson answered, "Yes. I have also."

McGettigan seemed surprised by the response and asked Anderson a flurry of follow-ups.

"Eleven-year-olds?" McGettigan said.

Yes, Anderson said.

"That you didn't know?"

"Yes."

He said, "I do it all the time," and added, "There are regularly young boys at the YMCA showering at the same time that there are older people showering."

Sandusky is accused of molesting 10 boys over the course of 15 years. But Anderson said he'd never seen Sandusky do anything inappropriate. That was echoed by Booker T. Brooks,

another defense witness who had worked with Sandusky at Penn State when Sandusky was an assistant to head coach Joe Paterno.

“Have you ever showered with young kids?” defense attorney Joseph Amendola said.

“Many times,” Brooks said.

Amendola asked if he was always naked in the shower.

“I have never showered with any type of clothing on,” Brooks said.

He offered a more general character assessment of Sandusky: “I think he’s a great guy.”

Sandusky is charged with 51 counts related to child sex abuse. Prosecutors dropped one charge Monday morning because of the statute of limitations.

Tom Kline, an attorney for one of the alleged victims, said after hearing the start of the defense’s case, “I think that it’s lame. The concept that it was culturally correct to shower with little boys falls flat on its face when you get into the particulars of this case.”

The morning began with a motion by the defense to throw out many of the charges on grounds of “non-specificity.” The witnesses who testified against Sandusky about events years in the past were for the most part uncertain about the dates of alleged assaults. The defense said this impinged upon Sandusky’s ability to offer alibi witnesses, who might say that he was somewhere else when the incidents allegedly happened.

“It’s very difficult to defend when the charges include long periods of time without specific information about where and when they occurred,” defense attorney Karl Rominger told Judge John Cleland.

Rominger also pointed out that that “Victim 2” has always been an unidentified boy of unknown age. Penn State assistant coach Mike McQueary said he saw the boy being assaulted by Sandusky in a shower. McQueary estimated that the boy was between 10 and 12 years old. Rominger contended that McQueary had no expertise to judge the age of the boy, and that the fact that he was pre-pubescent did not mean he was as young as McQueary thought. Puberty can come as late as 16, Rominger said.

Cleland acknowledged that the non-specific nature of many of the charges has bothered him earlier in the case: "It's no secret I've been concerned about this from the beginning." But Cleland said the prosecutor's charges have been amended since the case began, and he is comfortable that due process has been observed.

He ruled against the defense. That cleared the way for the swiftly moving trial to go forward.

The prosecution rested at 10:42 a.m. Monday after calling one last witness, a distraught mother who said she blamed herself for not stopping the alleged abuse of her young son. She is the mother of "Victim 9," who testified Thursday that Sandusky had abused him repeatedly for four years during weekend sleepovers at Sandusky's house.

The judge has required that the alleged victims be identified in court by their full names but expressed hope that media organizations covering the trial would follow their customary practices to protect victims' privacy. The Washington Post generally does not identify alleged sex-crime victims.

The mother said the boy had chronic stomach problems and would sometimes tell her he didn't want to go to Sandusky's home. She told him to go anyway.

She noticed something else odd about her son:

"I always wondered why he never had any underwear in the laundry," she said. "He said he'd had an accident and threw them out."

The prosecutor asked, "Do you feel a little responsible?"

"Yes, I do," she said, sobbing.