



by Kevin Johnson

Jun. 20, 2012

Abuse trial ends without Sandusky testimony

Jerry Sandusky's defense against 51 counts of child sex abuse charges rested Wednesday with defense attorneys deciding not to offer testimony from the former Penn State assistant coach.

Defense attorney Joe Amendola had strongly signaled in his opening arguments last week that Sandusky, 68, would take the witness stand. But just before noon following the testimony of four witnesses Amendola stood briefly and announced that his case had concluded.

Closing arguments in the case will begin Thursday.

"There was great expectation built up that Mr. Sandusky was going to take the stand and say this didn't happen," lawyer Thomas Kline, who represents one of the alleged victims, said outside the courtroom. "He didn't do that. Jurors look for direct refutation of charges. Here we didn't see any direct refutation of a mountain of evidence."

For the defense the decision whether to have Sandusky testify was full of risks. Those risks were heightened by Sandusky's halting performance in pre-trial interviews with NBC's Bob Costas and later with The New York Times.

In both interviews Sandusky hesitated when he was asked about whether he was attracted to young boys. Last week prosecutors offered the NBC interview as evidence against Sandusky.

Earlier on Wednesday a former participant in Jerry Sandusky's charity for troubled children told jurors that he believed investigators wanted him to provide false information about the former coach now charged with 51 counts of child sex abuse.

"I felt like they wanted me to say something that wasn't true," David Hilton testified.

Hilton said that he was visited three times by Pennsylvania police and that their inquiries intensified with each visit.

"They said if I was lying, I could get in trouble," he said.

Hilton said that nothing inappropriate ever happened with Sandusky, whom he described as a "father figure" to him during his childhood. Hilton said he once traveled with Sandusky to San Francisco and had visited his home dozens of times.

He also said the former coach often called Hilton to assist the boy with his vocabulary when he struggled with academics in elementary school.

On cross-examination, Hilton said that prosecutors never suggested that he lie about his experiences with Sandusky.

Hilton acknowledged meeting with Senior Deputy Attorney General Joe McGettigan, who Hilton described as a "pretty cool guy." The remark prompted laughter from the packed courtroom.

Earlier in testimony, the family friend of key prosecution witness Michael McQueary told jurors that McQueary never related that he saw Sandusky in a sexual position with a young boy in a Penn State shower room in 2001.

Jonathan Dranov, a physician, said he was called to the home of the Penn State assistant football coach, where he found him "shaken." McQueary told Dranov he had heard "sexual sounds" during a visit to the university locker room earlier that night.

McQueary testified last week that he saw a naked Sandusky in the shower in a sexual position behind a boy believed to be about 10 to 12 years old.

Dranov, who was called to the McQueary home to provide counsel, said he pressed McQueary to describe what he saw. But McQueary, he said, never described witnessing a sexual act.

“What did you see?” Dranov said, recalling his questioning of McQueary.

Each time Dranov said he asked that question McQueary described only the “sounds.”

The shower incident was one of the most explosive allegations lodged against Sandusky when charges were announced in November. The university was widely criticized for not dealing with the information that McQueary said he gave to the head of campus police.

The charges eventually led to the ouster of university President Graham Spanier and the firing of head football coach Joe Paterno.

Sandusky is accused of abusing 10 children during a span of 15 years. He could get life in prison if convicted.

Sandusky’s wife, Dottie Sandusky, testified Tuesday, telling jurors she never saw any inappropriate contact involving her husband and his alleged victims.

Mrs. Sandusky’s appearance was preceded by a stream of family friends and past participants in the coach’s charity who voiced their strong support for the coach.