

Sandusky's wife defends him on national TV

By Allison Steele

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

For more than a year, a documentary producer and other supporters of Jerry Sandusky have been building a campaign to discredit his accusers and the investigation that led to his conviction as Pennsylvania's most infamous serial sex abuser of children.

The latest step came Wednesday, as Sandusky's wife defended her husband in a nationally broadcast interview. "People need to know that Jerry is not guilty," Dottie Sandusky told NBC's Today.

The image of a tearful Dottie Sandusky contrasted sharply with the spouse who testified matter-of-factly at her husband's 2012 trial and who had been described by his victims as aloof and disinterested. And it outraged advocates for the young men who had described being abused in her home, sometimes when she was in another room.

"She has the right to her own narrative. She can say it and believe it," said Tom Kline, the Philadelphia lawyer for one victim who testified at the Centre County trial. "But to spew the venom that so miserably failed at trial, and to spew it at young men whose lives were devastated, who cried openly at trial - that's tragic on many levels."

Jennifer Storm, who heads the state victim advocate's office and who has worked with Sandusky's

accusers, called NBC morally reprehensible for airing the interview. "I don't understand what the gain is here, other than to harm not only these victims, but other victims of abuse who may see this as a reason to stay silent," she said.

The appearance was orchestrated largely by John Ziegler, 46, a former talk radio host and television sportscaster who has produced a short documentary about the Sandusky case as well as a website dedicated to examining the evidence against Sandusky and former Pennsylvania State University football coach Joe Paterno.

Ziegler, who has also developed documentaries about media bias in the 2008 presidential election and political censorship after the 9/11 terror attacks, conducted a prison interview last year with Sandusky in which the former coach hypothesized that witnesses against him were influenced by overzealous prosecutors.

Last month, Ziegler took out a full-page ad in the State College Centre Daily Times to explain the ways in which he believes the basic facts in the case have been misunderstood.

In a video on his website, Ziegler said he had been urging Dottie Sandusky to speak out for a year, and that he essentially brokered the terms of the NBC appearance.

"I wanted the nation to see that Dottie Sandusky knows her husband

is innocent," he said Wednesday. "She's not delusional. She's not stupid. And I want people to see that the pillars of this case were built on sand, not steel."

Jerry Sandusky, 70, is serving a 30- to 60-year sentence at a state prison in Greene County in southwestern Pennsylvania. The former assistant football coach was convicted of abusing 10 boys he met through a charity he founded for underprivileged youth.

Ziegler told NBC's Matt Lauer that the trial and verdict were "a sham." He contends the accusers were manipulated and changed their stories after it was suggested to them that Sandusky was a pedophile. He has not unearthed or presented any evidence to substantiate the claim.

Penn State has approved nearly \$60 million in settlements with Sandusky's victims.

The Today interview was taped at the Sandusky home, where the one-time coach had given his own videotaped interview before trial - to the New York Times - and where some of his victims later testified he had abused them.

Dottie Sandusky led Lauer and his cameras to the basement room where several accusers claimed they had sleepovers that turned into sexual assaults by Jerry Sandusky.

One victim testified at trial that Dottie Sandusky had been upstairs while he screamed for help as the

coach raped him - a claim she denied Wednesday.

In the NBC interview, Dottie Sandusky also discussed how her husband had adapted to life in prison, saying he spends 23 hours in a small cell, reading, writing, and meditating. He spends time looking up cases in the prison library and is hopeful about his pending appeal for a new trial, she said.

When Lauer told her many people would find it unbelievable that Sandusky was put in prison due to a series of manipulations by attorneys and the justice system, she said: "I think people may need to look at the transcripts, and see all the discrepancies that went on in trial."

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