

Navy quarterback not guilty of rape

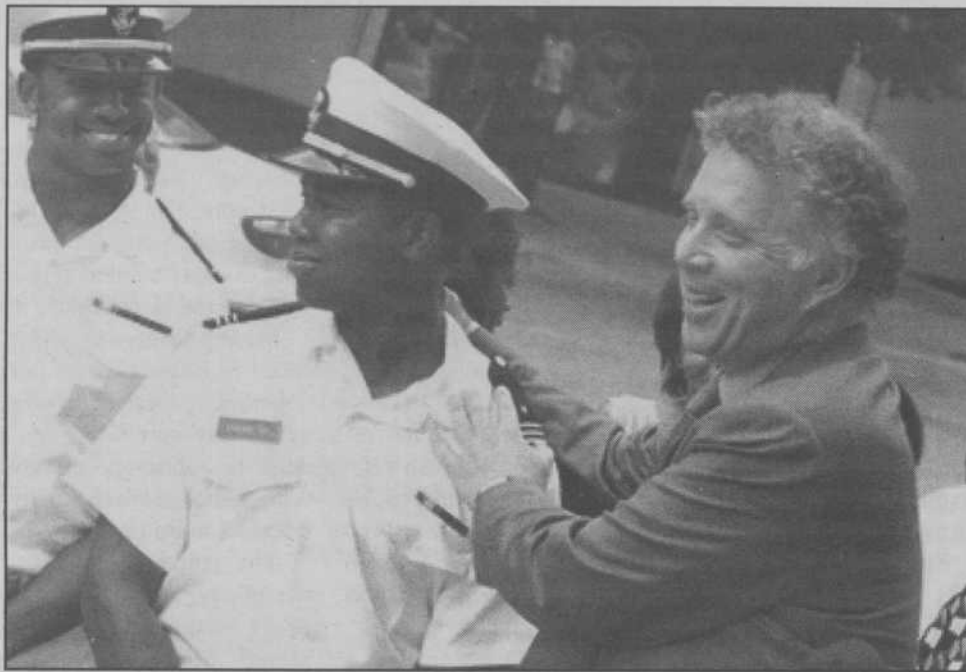
By Whitney James
Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - After almost two weeks of testimonies from more than a dozen witnesses, a five-member military jury recently found Navy quarterback star Lamar Owens not guilty of raping a female midshipman earlier this year. He was, however, found guilty of entering the room uninvited, which was termed unbecoming behavior for an officer and a gentleman.

The verdict came after the dramatic last days of testimony and closing statements from the accused and lawyers. Owens testified earlier in the week that the victim invited him over five minutes prior to his entrance and that she never told him to leave. Once the victim was in the bed, she motioned for him to come over and tugged on his sweater.

"I took that as an invite to her bed," he said.

The court also heard from Owens' wide receiver coach at the U.S. Naval Academy and his Bible study pastor, who vouched for Owens' good character. Both men claimed to know Owens per-



Defense Attorney Reid Weingarten, right, tries to lighten a moment with client, former U.S. Naval Academy quarterback Lamar S. Owens Jr., as Owens' friend Ensign Jeremy McGown, left, watches during a news conference outside the courthouse at the Navy Yard in Washington on Friday. Owens was found not guilty of raping a female midshipman.

sonally and said that he displayed a great deal of leadership and character.

The coach, responsible for recruiting Owens to play football for the U.S. Naval Academy explained the importance of being the captain of the Academy's football team and said that although it was a big responsibility, Owens had the courage,

work ethic and character to do the job.

"There has never an instance where he has not been 100 percent honest," he said.

The pastor said that Owens "was extremely gifted and charismatic" and made it a point to tell the court that he attended Bible study almost every week. This seemed to paint a pic-

ture of Owens as a wholesome young man.

None of that seemed to matter when prosecuting attorney Commander David Wilson presented his closing argument, however. Although he did admit that the level of alcohol the victim consumed played a factor, she still "never consented to having sex with the accused,"

he said and painted a heart-wrenching scenario of what the victim might have gone through.

Refuting earlier testimony that painted the victim as a drunk who often blacked out, Wilson reminded the jury of expert testimony that the blackouts do not change one's behavior. He also went on to say that when the victim's boyfriend came in "he heard loud crying."

Wilson slipped up, however, when he quoted the victim as saying she was raped when it was established by earlier testimony that she had said, "I think I was raped." This "erroneous mistake," called by the judge, sparked immediate objection from the defense.

Because this quote was untrue as well as misleading, the judge made it a point to call the prosecutor out on the mistake.

Careful not to repeat the prosecutor's error, the defense's closing argument seemed to be one of concise facts and some emotion.

"This young man's life is on the line," defense attorney Reid Weingarten said.

Calling the victim's blackouts "blackouts of convenience," the defense claimed the victim did not want to remember anything bad that had happened. He also pointed out that the victim's night and day behavior was obviously triggered by alcohol and although she denied she had a drinking problem, there were several instances where this proved to be untrue. Calling the victim out on three counts of ag-

gressive behavior while intoxicated, Weingarten showed the court that the victim indeed did have an alter-ego and may have been in character during the night of the alleged rape.

"She was afraid of her own decisions when she realized what she had done," he said.

The defense's points also included the lack of care the victim's friends showed towards her when they found out she had been allegedly raped, the fact that the instant messages sent to Owens were erased once her boyfriend came into the room, and why nobody, not even the case agent, asked the victim how Owens got into her room in the first place.

"It would have messed up their big case," Weingarten argued, adding, "They used the star quarterback as bait."

Although Owens was acquitted for raping the victim, the defense still has to wait for sentencing and decision to either drop or keep the second charge, misconduct of an officer and a gentleman.

"Lamar Owens is a man of dignity, strength and character and we're very relieved that this young man has been acquitted of the first charge. He has a bright future ahead of him," he said.

The defense team seems sure they will beat the second charge however.

"We are confident that we will beat the second charge because there is no evidence on the record for this charge," Weingarten said.

Whitney James writes for Afro Newspapers.

Judge blasts DA in Duke case

By Cash Michaels
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WILMINGTON, N.C. (NNPA) - The cousin of the alleged victim in the Duke lacrosse rape case says it's about time a judge admonished the defense attorneys for their constant and aggressive negative spin of the evidence against the accuser.

Jakki (she withholds her last name for protection), the designated spokesperson for the North Carolina Central University student and young mother of two who alleges she was raped and beaten by three indicted members of the Duke University lacrosse team last March during a wild, off-campus party.

Jakki adds that her younger cousin "is touched" by the outpouring of love and support she's received from the public given the avalanche of damaging information the defense and major media have circulated about her.

But it was Durham Superior Court Judge Kenneth C. Titus' warning of the high-powered Duke lacrosse defense attorneys during a hearing last week that made the alleged victim's family and

supporters jump for joy.

Titus and others grew concerned that the possibility of a fair trial was rapidly becoming more remote because of the massive amount of negative pre-trial publicity.

Titus is the resident jurist who will preside over the three-stage case management pre-trial hearings in the case for the next six months, threatened contempt-of-court charges if all parties did not adhere to his warning.

"Bravo to that, because that's something that I think the former judge should have done," Jakki said. "[Our family] is just elated."

"Now, maybe there will be more of a level playing field," she said.

Even Durham District Attorney Mike Nifong has admitted that he stepped out of bounds with the 50 to 70 television interviews he gave in the early stages of the investigation.

Nifong, who is up for reelection this year stopped the media appearances after the May primary.

On the other hand, the high-priced defense attorneys representing Colin

Finnerty, 19; Reade Seligmann, 20; and David Evans, 23, have continued to hold numerous press conferences, conduct many media interviews.

They were reportedly responsible for leaking photographs and discovery evidence to selected members of the major media like MSNBC's Dan Abrams and a Duke University alum; also filing questionable motions designed to bait the press with damaging and scandalous discovery information about the alleged victim that challenges her veracity about her allegations.

Titus made it clear that he had heard enough.

Citing behavior prohibited by Rule 3.6 of the N.C. [State Bar Association's] Revised Rules of Professional Conduct, Titus told all of the attorneys before him: "It is this court's responsibility to ensure that the defendants and the state proceed with the constitutionally guaranteed right to a fair trial by a jury free from partiality, bias or prejudice."

He continued, "I am, therefore, entering an order in these cases, which require

compliance..."

That ruling limits attorneys on all sides of an ongoing case to comments and responses that do not ultimately prejudice evidence in a trial.

Nifong has been blamed for calling the Duke lacrosse suspects "a bunch of hooligans" publicly, while defense attorneys have called the alleged victim "a false accuser," among other things.

Outside the court, defense attorneys, maintaining their spin of what clearly was a judicial rebuke of their previous actions, said they did nothing wrong, and in fact, would continue doing what they've been doing.

D.A. Nifong left the courtroom saying nothing to reporters, which has been his practice for months.

Duke defense attorneys have not returned phone calls for comments from Black newspapers, and have made no attempt to reach out to the Black Press, fearing, perhaps, a less than favorable reception for their negative spin campaign against the Black female alleged victim.

Cash Michaels writes for the Wilmington Journal.

Power 88 "The People's Station" presents

Galaxy Glenn's Birthday Celebration & Party

w/ The Lovely Ms. Brenda

Friday, July 28th

\$Best Dressed\$ Givaways Couple Contest T-Shirts and More

Special Guest

George Wallace
COMEDIAN EXTRAORDINAIRE

Tony Terry
R&B/GOSPEL ARTIST

Sam's Town Live
inside Sam's Town Hotel
5111 Boulder Hwy.

KCEP 88.1 FM

21 & older affair