

Teacher acquitted of sexual abuse

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A Baltimore private school teacher accused of sexually assaulting three students in 2005 was acquitted yesterday in the most serious case.

Charles Carroll, 30, was charged with groping a 13-year-old girl several times over three months, then raping her on a classroom floor.

Two other students, ages 13 and 17, also said that Carroll sexually assaulted them. Prosecutors said they will proceed with those cases and will set trial dates today.

Jurors in last week's trial did not hear about the other allegations because a judge ruled that information inadmissible. Carroll's first trial, in January, was declared a mistrial when several witnesses mentioned the other girls.

Carroll took the stand last week in his defense. He testified that he never inappropriately touched his students at Community Initiatives Academy in East Baltimore.

With no physical evidence, the trial hinged entirely on the testimony of the girl.

In his closing argument yesterday morning, defense attorney Edward Smith said the girl's version of events "doesn't make any sense."

She testified that she had asked Carroll for a ride home after school one snowy day in February 2005 and said that was when he raped her. Smith said in his closing that Feb. 23, the day of the alleged attack, "it simply was not snowing."

Smith also pointed jurors to what he said were other problems with her story. For example, he said, if Carroll had been acting inappropriately with the girl for a month, as she reported to the school and to police, why would she ask him for a ride home?

The prosecutor, Temmi Rollock, urged jurors to believe the girl, saying that even if she had a crush on Carroll - who she said was a popular, well-liked teacher - her youth prevented her from consenting to sexual activities with him.

The Sun does not identify anyone who has reported a sex crime.

The other 13-year-old accused Carroll of squeezing her buttocks and chest in a school hallway, and the 17-year-old accused him of doing the same to her in the school cafeteria.

When the three girls' allegations came to light in the spring of 2005, so, too, did Carroll's criminal background. He served six years in prison after a conviction in 1995 for second-degree murder stemming from a fight.

Administrators at the Christian school knew about the conviction when they hired him in 2002 but did not tell parents about it.

Witnesses at Carroll's trial last week included a teacher at the school and Principal Christina V. Philips Holtsclaw. At this time of Carroll's arrest in 2005, the principal said she had hired Carroll because she believes in second chances.

Smith said yesterday that Holtsclaw "still believes in Charles Carroll."

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