

# Students testify at ex-teacher's sex battery trial

APR 03 '96 PD WED  
By SANDRA CLARK  
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

ELYRIA — Two high school students maintained their composure while describing in court the sexual activity they had with their teacher and coach.

But questions about other uncomfortable events in their lives shattered their composure and tears flowed openly.

The two young women, both now seniors at Brookside High School in the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake school system, accused their suspended teacher, Steven A. Kleppe, of sexual misconduct.

Kleppe, 28, is charged with two counts of sexual battery involving

one of the students. The charges stem from Kleppe's alleged conduct with a 17-year-old that ended in intercourse four times, twice in his home and twice in his car. The trial began yesterday in Lorain County Common Pleas Court.

The other student, 19-year-old Sarah Jane Holley, said Kleppe fondled and kissed her almost daily on school grounds during school hours.

Kleppe is not charged with having sexual contact with Holley, who has filed a civil suit against the district.

SEE SEX/4-B



RAMON MENA OWENS / PLAIN DEALER

Suspended teacher Steven A. Kleppe, 28, listens in Lorain County Common Pleas Court, where he faces two counts of sexual battery.

## Students testify at ex-teacher's trial

SEX FROM 1-B

The criminal law that prohibits teachers from having sex with students does not apply to Holley because she was 18 at the time.

In an attempt to establish a pattern, Assistant Prosecutor Lisa A. Locke Graves said both students were Brookside juniors when the alleged events occurred. Both said Kleppe made disparaging re-

marks to them about his wife, Tammy M. Kleppe.

Incidents involving the two students allegedly happened during the 1994-1995 school year. Both were Kleppe's student aides and spent several class periods alone with him in his small, windowless office.

Both students testified they consented to the activity.

The two witnesses' credibility,

however, came under attack by defense attorney Dominic J. Vannucci during opening statements and questions.

Vannucci said that as a teacher, Kleppe was vulnerable to such allegations. He taught at Brookside five years and coached several sports, including the girls basketball team, of which the 17-year-old was a member. Kleppe was indicted and suspended without pay in November.

"It didn't happen," Vannucci told the jury of seven women, six men and one alternate. "Neither one of them have a great reputation for truth and honesty. It is not testimony that will establish beyond a reasonable doubt this sexual conduct took place."

While cross-examining the 17-year-old, Vannucci asked her why she left a job she once held at a fast-food restaurant. When he said she was accused of stealing food, the witness began to cry.

Under questioning from Vannucci, Holley admitted she had previously accused another man of molesting her. She then sobbed uncontrollably.

# Teacher bares scar at sex trial

APR 04 '96 PM THU

(B/kw)

By SANDRA CLARK  
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

ELYRIA — Suspended Brookside High School teacher and coach Steven A. Kleppe stripped to the waist in court yesterday to show a scar that his lawyers said a female student should have seen if the two actually had sex, as she claimed.

Kleppe is charged with two counts of sexual battery for allegedly having intercourse with the student during the 1994-95 school year. Kleppe teaches and coaches several sports at the high school, including girls varsity basketball. The girl was his student aide and played on the basketball team.

A second student testified that Kleppe also made inappropriate sexual advances toward her. She filed a civil lawsuit and is not included in this criminal case.

Kleppe testified yesterday and denied the charges.

The jury of six men and six women began deliberating late yesterday afternoon. They will continue today.

Lorain County Common Pleas Judge Kosma J. Glavas permitted Kleppe to remove his coat, tie and shirt and pose before the jury. Glavas said that it was the first time such a thing had happened in his courtroom.

Kleppe exposed the surgical scar, which runs under his right breast and wraps around his shoulder blade.

"Obviously, I thought it was very important and it put a dent in her credibility," defense attorney Dominic J. Vannucci said. "It raised some doubt in my mind. But I'm not the one who counts."

The student testified about the affair Tuesday. Although she often was shaky about times, she was matter-of-fact about each alleged tryst. She said they had sex twice in his car and twice Jan. 5 at his home.

She said that after the liaison at his house, Kleppe brought her home and talked with her parents. The student's mother testified that Kleppe came in with her daughter that night.

"I was real jittery and nervous," the student said. "Oh, what if my parents read my mind?"

Under cross-examination, she said Kleppe had a hairy upper body. She said she did not notice a scar, but she did not remember if he had removed his shirt during intercourse.

SEE SEX/6-B

## Teacher bares scar at trial

SEX FROM 1-B

In addition to the scar, Vannucci presented a laundry list of other challenges to the student's claims.

Vannucci also introduced Kleppe's wife, Tammy M. Kleppe, who gave her husband an alibi for the evening the student said they had spent together at his house.

Tammy Kleppe said her husband and their 2-year-old daughter met her at a department store, where she worked. They bought pants, she said.

Assistant Prosecutor Lisa A. Locke Graves countered each of Vannucci's challenges. She reminded the jury that the events took place at night and that the

student had not said whether the teacher removed his shirt.

The credit card receipt at the department store was signed by Tammy alone. "It could save her husband's tail if she said he was standing next to her" when the pants were purchased, Locke Graves said.

Assistant Prosecutor Lisa A. Locke Graves maintained that the girls told the truth and that Kleppe violated the trust parents, students and the community place in teachers.

Kleppe "had control," she said. "He took these young girls into his domain. He took control in every way he could, right up to sexual activity."

# Teacher found guilty of sex with student

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By SANDRA CLARK  
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

ELYRIA — Despite his repeated denials, a Sheffield-Sheffield Lake teacher was found guilty yesterday of having sex with a student.

Steven A. Kleppe, a suspended teacher and girls basketball coach at Brookside High School, was sentenced to two years in prison on two counts of sexual battery and was denied bail. Following the verdict, Kleppe received a tongue-lashing from Lorain County Common Pleas Judge Kosma J. Glavas.

"You're a teacher, a molder of

young minds. I, as a parent, and many other parents, turn over to you our most prized possessions, our children," Glavas said. When teachers take advantage of their position as mentor and confidante, "I, for one, get very upset."

Kleppe, 29, faced the bench and said quietly, "I'd like to address the court and say, I've maintained my innocence throughout this whole ordeal."

To that, Glavas replied, "Twelve ladies and gentlemen indicated otherwise."

Kleppe's sentences are to be served concurrently, but he could be released within 16 months, As-

sistant Prosecutor Lisa A. Locke Gravers said.

The parents of the 17-year-old in the case spoke briefly before the sentencing. The mother said she hoped Kleppe received counseling.

He was handcuffed and allowed to spend a moment with his family. His wife, Tammy, wept quietly. The students' parents also sobbed.

Kleppe pleaded not guilty to charges he had sex with the 17-year-old he coached on his basketball team. A second student, who was not included in the criminal case, testified during the

trial that Kleppe made inappropriate sexual advances toward her, as well.

Both students said they ended the relationships because he was married.

Kleppe denied their allegations, saying he was shopping with his wife and 2-year-old daughter when one of the liaisons allegedly occurred. He said he will appeal the verdict.

Kleppe taught at Brookside in the Sheffield-Sheffield Lake school system for about five years and had a spotless teaching record.

He was indicted in November

and suspended without pay shortly afterward. The suspension set the termination process in motion. Those proceedings may not be necessary. State law permits the state Board of Education to revoke the certificate of a teacher convicted of a felony. The teacher is entitled to a hearing.

Sheffield-Sheffield Lake Superintendent Charles Krepp could not be reached for comment last night. Prosecutors declined to comment. The school system is being sued by the older student who testified.

# Getting tough on teachers in trouble

MAR 18 '96 PD MON

## More certificates being yanked

By SANDRA CLARK

PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

B1 (W)

Teachers who step across legal and moral lines are losing their teaching certificates in greater numbers.

The Ohio Department of Education has adopted several means to separate wayward teachers from their certificates and cut them off from the classroom.

The department has improved communications with prosecutors and local school districts, who tell them when a teacher is accused or convicted of some wrongdoing.

For the first time, the department has a full-time investigator to follow up with those sources.

Barbara A. Rogers, hired last year as the department's professional conduct consultant, investigates cases and brings teachers to hearings before the State Board of Education, where their teaching credentials are at stake.

The number of revocations, suspensions and application denials rose from 27 in 1992 to 52 in 1995. Records before 1992 are incomplete.

That is a fraction of the certificates carried in good standing by Ohio's 121,500 teachers. But sexual misconduct with students accounted for about half the offenses during the four-year period.

Infractions ranged from flirtatious notes, comments and touching, to intercourse, rape and stalking. The number of certificate revocations for sexual misconduct with students rose 25.9 percent from 1992 to 1995.

Rogers said the increases were due to more aggressive reporting, not an increase in the number of teachers doing things wrong.

"Just because we're seeing more reports doesn't mean incidents have gone up," she said.

State Superintendent John M. Goff said the increases were due to better communications with prosecutors as well as intolerance by local districts.

"I think a big piece of this is we're just getting more information," he said. Convicted teachers could retain their certificate if the state board is not informed,

The department has improved

communications with prosecutors and local school districts, who tell them when a teacher is accused or convicted of some wrongdoing.

he said. "If we never hear about it, obviously, we couldn't do anything."

Moreover, he said, fewer districts will agree to let a bad teacher quietly resign, then move on to another school system. Education insiders call this "passing the trash."

"I think that's less tolerated today," Goff said. "People simply aren't willing to do that."

A criminal conviction isn't necessary to revoke a certificate, if the state school board is convinced after a hearing that improper conduct took place.

The department has taken another important step to separate bad teachers from the classroom: It joined a national network that lists the names and backgrounds of the nation's certificate-carrying teachers. The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification lists the names of teachers throughout North America.

As a result of the clearing-house, Daryl J. Angel lost his ability to teach in Ohio when the department learned Kentucky yanked his certificate in May 1993. Angel, a teacher and band director at Dixon Heights High School in Kenton County, pleaded guilty to criminal trespass and unlawful sexual conduct with a 16-year-old female student.

Rogers said she was as vigilant about contacting neighboring states about wayward teachers as she was about contacting local prosecutors and school districts.