

Teenager takes stand in defense of child sex charges

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JONESBORO — A Jonesboro teenager adjudicated guilty twice for sexual assaults on girls before he was 15 took the stand Wednesday to deny a third accusation that could send him to prison for life.

Roderick C. Craft Jr., 18, repeatedly denied raping the 11-year-old sister of a friend in January 2011. He was cross-examined by Clayton County Assistant District Attorney Mike Thurston.

"I ain't done none of that, I ain't seen none of that," said Craft. He said he voluntarily gave a bucal swab the night he was arrested because he was innocent. "I knew they ain't gonna have nothing cause I ain't done nothing."

When Thurston showed Craft a diagram showing where the girl suffered a tear on her genitals, he again denied involvement.

"You didn't do that?" Thurston asked him. "Is that what you're saying?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," said Craft. "I didn't cause that."

The only other defense witness, Ivenetta Trammell, was in the house at the time of the alleged rape. She said she confronted Craft when she learned the police were on the way over to talk to him.

"I asked him what happened," said Trammell. "He said he didn't touch her, the only thing that happened was a kiss."

Under cross-examination by Thurston, Trammell offered up another comment Craft reportedly made to her during that same conversation.

"He said he didn't know how old she was," Trammell said.

Under direct-examination, Craft denied touching the girl at all and said she made advances to him while he talked on his cell phone to another girl.

"She started rubbing my leg," said Craft. "I moved my leg and asked her, 'What you doing?' She said, 'Don't act like you don't want me rubbing your leg.' I told her, 'We're supposed to be like

cousins."

Craft insisted he was on his phone the entire time. He said the girl abruptly got up, left the room and went into the bathroom. When she exited, she was buttoning her pants and her mother was behind her, said Craft.

"Her mother asked me what happened and I said I was on the phone the whole time, I ain't done nothing," he said. "She said she was taking her daughter to the hospital. I told her to go ahead and they left."

Craft said he stayed at the house until police arrived to question him.

"I told the man what happened because I didn't do nothing," he said.

During the state's case, Thurston and co-counsel Luana Popescu Nolen presented two previous victims to show prior bad acts by Craft. Thurston told trial Judge Geronda Carter that Craft was adjudicated of the acts in Juvenile Court but Carter kept him from telling the jury the disposition of the cases.

The first victim was 11 when Craft tried to force her to perform oral sex on him outside the school gym in March 2009. Her name is being withheld because she was a sexual assault victim. The girl, now 15, told jurors that after some horseplaying in the hallways between classes, she found herself kneeling in a corner with Craft.

"He was pushing my head trying to make me do that," she said, getting emotional and covering her face with her long braids. "I closed my eyes so I couldn't see. I had my hand over my mouth. I didn't want to be doing that. I felt forced and I was telling him to stop."

The incident was witnessed by another student who also testified. Meosha Surry, 15, is a 10th grader at Forest Park High School but said she remembered that day back in middle school.

"I could see them in the corner," said Surry. "His pants were halfway down, to his knees, and she was on her knees. I saw her crying and telling him to move away so I walked over to ask what happened. When you see something, you should take caution in case it was something bad. He pulled his pants up. Her hair was out of her ponytail and she appeared upset."

Surry testified that she told the band director what happened. That report led to an investigation by School Resource Officer D. Warner of the Forest Park Police Department. Warner testified Wednesday that he filed charges of child molestation and disruption of public schools against Craft in Juvenile Court.

A month and five days later, Warner charged Craft with the same offense in a second case, he said. The girl in that case, now 18, won't be identified here because she is a sexual assault victim.

The victim testified to being in the school library after CRCT testing in April 2009. She said Craft moved to sit next to her and forced her to fondle his genitals until he climaxed. Warner testified that her hand was swollen from the force Craft used to keep it in place.

When Craft took the stand, he disavowed both incidents.

Defense attorney Emerson Carey Jr. asked for but was denied a mistrial. Carter also denied his request for a directed verdict of acquittal on the grounds the state didn't prove its case.