

## **SanduskyRegister.com Front Article**

### **Jury clears coach of molestation claims**

By [SARAH WEBER](#)

Sunday, September 14, 2008 11:57 PM EDT

#### **PORT CLINTON**

The jury had just two words for a former Port Clinton assistant coach accused of sexually abusing one of her players -- not guilty.

But the now 17-year-old girl who said she was molested had more.

"I hope you burn in hell," she screamed as 26-year-old Erin Baker left the courtroom Friday.

Baker was acquitted of 21 counts of sexual battery and 13 counts of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor for the alleged sexual relationship she had with the player in 2005 and 2006. The girl was a freshman and sophomore at Port Clinton High School at the time.

The jury deliberated for about four hours before delivering the not guilty verdict to the judge at 2:45 p.m. The girl, who sat in the courtroom with family members, broke down into sobs after the verdict was read.

Ottawa County Judge Paul Moon looked at Baker after declaring her not guilty and said, "You are a very lucky girl."

Baker avoided a maximum of 170 years in prison, five years for each of the 34 counts of sexual abuse.

Before the jury left to deliberate, assistant prosecutor Lorrain Croy asked the seven men and five women to pay special attention to the testimony of Dr. Catherine Holladay, a psychiatrist who worked with the girl and with sexual assault victims in the past.

She said young victims remember abuse in pieces, and can frequently not name specific dates and times. She also said it was normal that the girl did not report the abuse until a year after it ended -- 90 percent of victims fail to report they were sexually assaulted at all.

Baker's attorney, Thomas DeBacco, questioned several times during the trial why the girl didn't tell her parents, teachers or friends if something inappropriate happened.

In her closing arguments, Croy said Baker spent a long time establishing a close coach and student relationship, drawing the girl in and convincing family and friends she meant no harm before initiating the abuse. Holladay called this kind of slow manipulation "grooming."

"There is no defense for consent here," Croy said. "An adult cannot have a consensual sexual relationship with a minor."

DeBacco told the jury that common sense dictates the victim would have told someone, or indicated in a 2006 suicide letter if something inappropriate was going on.

"She was grooming (the girl), only she was grooming her to be a stronger person," DeBacco said.

DeBacco told the jury to remember testimony from Baker's family and friends who indicated Baker was a sensitive person who liked to help people. They and Baker declined to comment on the verdict.

Baker said in her testimony Thursday she had a sister-like friendship with the girl and did nothing

inappropriate.

"They would have you believe this girl who is fragile and sensitive and caring seized upon a prey," DeBacco said of his client.

He continued, "When you wake up some day thinking, 'Have I done justice,' I want you to think about this suicide note," he said.

In the note the girl called Baker her friend and sister.