

Accuser breaks down as NY cybersex case opens

By Jeanne King
Reuters

NEW YORK - The trial of a Columbia University doctoral candidate began Monday with prosecutors accusing him of a 20-hour sexual torture session in which he tied up, sodomized, bit and poured hot wax on a young woman he met on the Internet, who later broke down on the stand.

Oliver Jovanovic, 31, who was doing his thesis on molecular biology, is accused of kidnapping, sexual abuse, assault and performing sodomy on the Barnard College student. He faces up to life in prison if convicted.

Nontraditional students common at Florida colleges

By Jeff Kunerth
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

ORLANDO, Fla. - Linda Mittan stands, hands clasped, before her fellow grad-school classmates and talks about joint ventures, concentric diversifications and candy bars.

Mittan is a 55-year-old woman with blond hair a shade lighter than the yellow blouse beneath her navy blazer. Her voice bears the Texas twang of her birthplace and the clear, confident tone of her former life as an English teacher.

A demonstrative person, Mittan is concentrating on taming her hand gestures as she discusses the success of Cadbury-Schweppes, the candy and soda-pop conglomerate.

"They have a home page on the Internet that makes you drool," Mittan says.

In the classroom next door, Mittan's son is bent over his three-ring binder, taking notes in small, precise handwriting about microcontrollers, voice recognition and business information systems. Craig Fox wears the young corporate uniform: blue Oxford shirt, slacks, suspenders and high-gloss black shoes. The last time Mittan and Fox were in school together was a pottery class in 1985.

"I had a bad report card, and that was part of my punishment," says Fox, a 28-year-old advertising salesman with the American Automobile Association.

Now Mittan and Fox are mother-and-son college students at the University of Phoenix, an after-work institution of higher learning on the second floor of a Maitland office building.

Mittan is pursuing a master's degree in organizational management 34 years after she graduated from college. Fox is going after a bachelor's degree in computers and information systems 10 years after graduating from high school.

The University of Phoenix, which opened an Orlando campus in 1996, has been riding the wave of "nontraditional" college students such as Mittan and Fox since it opened in 1978. The school has 60,000 working-adult students on 40 campuses in 30 states. All the classes are at night. No student is younger than 24.

Nontraditional students are increasing at state colleges and universities as well. More than 40 percent of Florida's university students are older than 24. The average age of the state's community college students is 28.

Students 30 and older make up nearly a fourth of the University of Central Florida's students. Statewide, graduate students in Mittan's age range have more than doubled from 9 percent in 1984 to 18 percent in 1996.

At an age when others are counting down the years until retirement, Mittan is counting credits toward her master's degree.

"I want to assure my ability to get

of the kidnapping charge.

His accuser said she met the defendant in a chat room on the Internet during the summer of 1996.

"I thought he was interesting. He wasn't like the others on AOL (America Online). I was quite captivated by him," she said.

She said the two "talked about a lot of off-the-wall things" on the Internet, such as "The Wizard of Oz" and making the hallucinogenic drug LSD.

The two met for dinner on Nov. 22, 1996, and Jovanovic invited her to his apartment on the pretext of watching a video, she said. But according to prosecutors, the defendant allegedly tied her up, sodomized, bit and poured

In NCAA tournament, a David steps on a few toes

By Tom Schaefer
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

If you don't think basketball is a religion, then you haven't been watching the NCAA tournament.

This is the tournament that has players and fans alike praying to the heavens for just one more victory.

And then just one more.

Like an addict needing a fix, players and fans can't wait for the next game and the next chance to move closer to their dream: a national championship.

The craving for success is intense. The desire for yet another victory is rarely satisfied. ("C'mon, there's still 15 seconds left on the clock, for God's sake!")

Oh, I know about the highly regarded teams Duke University, the University of North Carolina, the University of Arizona and the University of Kentucky. They are the Goliaths of the tournament, towering above the rest of the field both in size and in skill. Most people expect one of them to win it all, taking the faithful to the Beulah Land of basketball.

We'll see, because there's always a David who shows up at the tournament.

For the sports-minded who are biblically illiterate, a David is a lowly seeded team whose members, the Goliaths assume, will stare at the ground so they won't have to see the fiery gaze of their big, bad, higher-seeded opponents. Lacking social graces for the Big Dance, they're expected to shuffle their feet and mumble, "Gosh, it's nice of you to let us play on your court. Hope we don't step on your toes."

Once again, one of those Davids has stepped on a few toes. And the team happens to be my favorite: Valparaiso University. (It's my favorite because my daughter Jami graduated from Valpo in 1994.) After its two miraculous victories in the tournament, I've become a born-again

a job in the future," Mittan says. "The best way to protect myself is to have an M.A. behind my name so I can compete with the twentysomethings with M.A.s behind their names."

Mittan has been a junior high English teacher, bank teller, receptionist, banking software specialist and training manager. She is working as a mortgage consultant while pursuing her graduate degree.

Her son is getting his bachelor's degree so he can compete for the kind of jobs his mother has held. A high school education hasn't held him back, but he expects it will someday.

"The thing that sticks out on my resume is a lack of a degree," he says.

Fox has other motivations as well: his wife Kim; a 2-year-old daughter; and a deadline imposed by his mother. Mittan told both her sons she would pay for college until they're 30.

"My wife was really on my back, because she knows my mother has the 30-year cutoff," Fox says.

They are similar in some ways, mother and son, but different in more ways. Fox is an easygoing young man

hot wax on the woman during a 20-hour sexual torture session.

The woman said the incident began when Jovanovic handed her a graphic book by Joel Peter Witkin that prosecutors said was based on his exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum.

"It was shocking photos of corpses, of dead men, rotting skulls with people making out ... stretched penises and naked men with erect penises," the woman said in hushed tones.

She broke down twice looking at pictures and the book and Acting Supreme Court Judge William Wetzel ended testimony until Tuesday.

Assistant district attorney Gail

supporter.

This Lutheran college in northern Indiana, with at most 3,500 students, has a basketball team that lost its first game of the season to an NAIA school. Faith shattering! Since then, the Crusaders have resurrected their dead-in-the-water start and have put together a pre-tournament record of 21 wins, 9 losses. The players are starting to believe in their divine destiny.

I know what you're thinking: God doesn't care whether a sports team wins or loses. Well, tell that to Valpo's star player. When Bryce Drew made a last-second jump shot to beat Ole Miss, he credited the trajectory and the needed oomph to a heavenly power.

"When I let it go, it felt a little short," he said after the game. "I think divine intervention helped it go in."

And did you hear (via television) the pre-game prayer in the Valpo locker room that sought to tilt the balance of power in the Crusaders' favor?

"Lord, if it is your will, let us win this game." And everybody said "Amen!"

Of course I'm sure the Ole Miss players and fans were pleading just as fervently for divine intervention. It reminded me of the half-serious statement presumably made by German Lutherans a few generations ago about Genesis 3:9. They claimed that when God walked in the Garden of Eden looking for Adam, he asked, in German: "Wo bist du?" ("Where are you?") Maybe, in a similar way, God blesses an aggressive man-to-man defense when put on by Lutherans.

Still not convinced of a team's divine destiny? How about Valpo's win two days later against Florida State, a school with an enrollment 10 times Valparaiso's?

"I know that nobody believed we could do this," Homer Drew, Valpo's coach, said after the 83-77 overtime victory, "but these guys played with

who meandered through life, going wherever opportunity carried him. His mother is a self-propelled person with desire to succeed.

Mittan contends that working and going to school in her middle age is no more arduous than working and raising two sons while caring for a husband dying of cancer.

"That was very difficult, but somebody had to be there, somebody had to take him to the chemotherapy," says Mittan, who has been divorced, widowed and remarried now for nine years. "That's the way I was brought up - you do what has to be done to get the job finished."

When his class ends, Fox waits patiently outside his mother's classroom. Both have been up, at work, and in class for 15 hours.

The routine of their lives is work, study, sleep, work, study, sleep - the clickety-clack rhythm of the nontraditional college student.

"You don't have time to think how tired you really are," Fox says. "I won't get tired until I get in the car. I look at the clock on the radio and it

Heatherly said the woman did not resist being tied up "because she's trying to believe it is still a joke, that he does not intend to hurt her."

But Jovanovic then poured hot wax on her stomach and on her breasts, thighs and genitals and told her "Get used to it," then bit her nipples, chest and shoulders, Heatherly said.

Jovanovic's lawyer, Jack Litman, told jurors the events were consensual and that the woman asked to be tied up and humiliated.

"Did Oliver kidnap her and hold her for 20 hours?" Litman asked, repeating the list of acts prosecutors accuse him of. "You will see that the answer to these questions is no."

all their heart, all their soul and all their might."

Did you catch the import of his words? They're from the Hebrew Scriptures: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Talk about having God on your side!

By now, you've probably concluded that I've gone over the edge, perverting the true meaning of religion. Or you think I'm vying for a cushy sports reporter's job. Wrong on both counts.

The fact is, religious language gets muddled in the excitement of sports. We see the players who kneel in the end zone after a touchdown to offer a prayer or who make the sign of the cross before they step in to the batter's box or walk up to the free-throw line. We know fans or we're one of them who quietly murmur a prayer as the tension of the sports moment rises. Both athletes and fans turn to the Almighty, I believe, because they feel a connection between faith and everyday life, including a sporting event. Their actions don't necessarily indicate a misuse of faith. It's instinctive to turn to God in crucial moments.

The danger, however, is when athletes and fans make sports the be-all and end-all of their lives, turning it into their religion. If they expect the Creator to bless their individual and team efforts, like some Greek god rendering favors on a whim, then they've taken sports a step too far. And at some point, their notion of divine destiny will come crashing down to earth.

Not that I would mind, you understand, if Valpo could win one more game, though I'd never expect God to show any favoritism. Just a small assist uncontested 3-point shots, aggressive rebounding, perfect shooting at the foul line to move one step closer to the Final Four. That's all I'm asking, Lord, just one more victory.

says 10:15, and I'm tired."

Mittan's classroom door opens. She smiles when she sees her son waiting in the hall.

"There you are," she says, and hands him a sack of soda-pop props for his family.

Their day began in the pre-dawn darkness on opposite ends of Orange County, Fla. The same moon that was up when they awoke has returned to its place in the sky when they step outside. The night is cool and breezy. They part in the parking lot with a wave.

"Bye-bye, Mom," Fox says. "Drive safe."

"I will," she replies. "Tell Kim hello."

The clock on Mittan's dashboard says 10:37 p.m. By the time she gets home, it is 52 minutes until tomorrow.

"It can be overwhelming. Sometimes I wonder, 'Why am I doing this?'" Mittan says. "But there are people who push themselves to expand, and people who don't. At this point, I've chosen education to put the pressure on me to expand."

College mascots are also a big part of every game

By Claire Weingarden Syracuse University
College Press Campus Correspondent

March Madness is here, bringing with it once again that widely held, seldom-challenged belief that the hardest working athletes on the basketball court are the ones handling the ball.

College mascots know better. And aside from all the bumps, bruises and unbelievable body odor they have to endure, many say their jobs are some

I went into the student section and some big guys picked me up, I ended up in the alumni section, where no one was into the whole crowd surfing thing, so I fell on a stack of chairs.

Scott Craig, Duke University's Blue Devil mascot

of the best gigs around.

After all, they have licenses to ditch insecurities for a while and act completely goofy in front of thousands of people. They get chances to poke fun at all the folks who deserve it most: stuffy alumni, snooty sorority girls, sloppy drunks and spectators who take the game too seriously. They also capture the hearts of children, who often want a picture with them, not some star point guard or quarterback.

And the beauty of it all, many mascots say, is that they work in near-total anonymity.

"Outside of the costume, I would consider myself to be a pretty shy person," said Tara Mobray, a junior chemistry major who is a Baby Jay mascot for The University of Kansas. "But once inside the costume, I can really turn it on."

"Athletes? These people aren't athletes," you say. But then you've probably never run around a basketball court or football field for hours on end wearing shoulder pads, fake fur overalls and 40-pounds of fiberglass headgear like John Seelman, a senior English and public relations major better known as "Bucky Badger" at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

"High endurance is the key to being able to stay alive out there while you're in costume," he said. "I probably lose 10 pounds per game because I sweat so much. It's not a pretty picture."

Added Mobray: "To be lively in that costume for hours on end, you've got to be a fairly athletic person. It gets unbelievably hot in there." And smelly.

Cornell tries to solve Great Pumpkin mystery

Reuters

ITHACA, N.Y. - The great pumpkin mystery at Cornell University came a step closer to being solved Friday when an orange object was

The object, dubbed the Cornell pumpkin, appeared inexplicably atop the 173-foot tower in October last year and what exactly it was has mystified the university ever since.

retrieved from the top of a library tower.

The object, dubbed the Cornell pumpkin, appeared inexplicably atop the 173-foot tower in October last year and what exactly it was has mystified the university ever since.

The school held a contest to guess what it might be and the student newspaper has been riddled with theories.

"Wearing that head can be terrible, especially the first couple of times," said Scott Craig, Duke University's Blue Devil. "I try and rinse the head out with a vodka and water solution, but really, it's no use. I feel for anyone who has to get near me after the game."

Mascots dance, dive, tumble, jump up and down and play fight with mascots from opposing teams — anything to rev up a crowd. The trick to being loved is maintaining a frenzied spontaneity that doesn't stop until the buzzer sounds. And, of course, keeping their balance while wearing costumes that obliterate their peripheral vision.

"When interviewing potential mascots, I look for individuals who aren't afraid to be crazy," said Linda Bell, cheerleading coach at Syracuse University. "I want to find people who can put on that costume and really become the character."

That's right, mascots have tryouts just like any other athlete.

"The physical part of the tryouts could have been renamed 101 ways to make an ass out of yourself," Seelman said. "I had to dance around in a gym for two and a half hours without even wearing the costume. I might as well have been naked."

Before they're hired, mascots also have to prove they're fast thinkers.

"I had to do a lot of improv," said Craig, a senior biomedical engineering major. "(The judges) wanted to see what I would do to pump up the crowd if the team was really cold. They also wanted to see how I would react if Duke had just scored the winning basket against UNC."

And, like any good athletes, mascots have to follow a few rules: They always lose play fights when they're working an away game; they don't talk while in costume (Some schools even require them not to reveal their identities to anyone.); and they try not to go into the stands without security.

"It's just not smart to head over to the crowd without having someone else with you," Craig said. "People mess with you, and 12-year-old boys are the worst. They know you're not real, and they're usually trying to prove it to the little kids who think you are. So they're always trying to rip my head off or mess with my costume."

Then there was that little crowd surfing incident.

"I went into the student section and some big guys picked me up," Craig said. "I ended up in the alumni section, where no one was into the whole crowd surfing thing, so I fell on a stack of chairs."

Ouch.

"That's OK," Craig said. "It's just a part of the job."

On Friday, Cornell officials used a crane to collect the mystery object and turned it over to its Plant Sciences department for testing. The department will reveal its findings in a week, said Cornell spokeswoman Linda Grace-Kobas.

"It's still a mystery," she said. "We never did find out how or who put it on top of the 173-foot tower. We are amazed at how it got up there."

Students sent up balloons, used probes and peered through telescopes to try to identify the mysterious object, she said.

When it first appeared on the top of the McGraw library tower, it was orange and looked like a large pumpkin.

But having spent the winter on the tower overlooking Lake Cayuga in upstate New York, it shrunk and became discolored, Grace-Kobas said. "It's gotten more shriveled and repulsive-looking," she said.

The winner of the contest, if there is one, will receive a T-shirt and money for textbooks, she said.