

Maryland high school football players accused of using broomstick in 'extraordinarily violent' rape

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Four Maryland 15-year-olds accused of sexually assaulting four football teammates in a Damascus High School locker room were granted \$20,000 bonds on Monday that will allow them to be released from jail pending trial.

A broomstick was used in the Oct. 31 assaults and each suspect is charged with one count of first-degree rape, three counts of attempted first-degree rape and one count of conspiracy to commit first-degree rape, authorities said in court Monday. Court documents assert the teenagers first turned off the lights and then moved from one victim to the next.

"This was an extraordinarily violent and cruel first-degree rape," Montgomery County Deputy State's Attorney Peter Feeney said during a court hearing in the case.

The four teens, members of the junior varsity squad, are charged as adults. A fifth team member is charged as a juvenile.

At least two of the suspects and two of the alleged victims told authorities the purported incidents are part of a known hazing practice among junior varsity football players at Damascus High School, according to charging documents.

When one victim asked three attackers stop, police said in the charging papers, the assailants replied that it was a "tradition." It remains unclear if that is true, or if the students were mistaken or repeating rumors.

The court hearings Monday in Montgomery County District Court follow a decision last week to charge the four teenage suspects in the case as adults.

Police identified the suspects as Jean Claude Abedi, 15, of Clarksburg; Kristian Jamal Lee, 15, of Germantown; Will Daniel Smith, 15, of Clarksburg; and Caleb Thorpe, 15, of Gaithersburg.

When initially charged as adults, each faced at least two counts of first-degree rape. Feeney said in court Monday the charges would be changed, reflecting a single count of first-degree rape, three counts of attempted first-degree rape, and the conspiracy count.

Daniel Wright, an attorney for Abedi, has said the charges should be handled in the juvenile court system, which is geared more toward rehabilitation than the adult court system.



"This is a hazing incident that went to extremes," Wright said in court Monday. "It was out of control because of the group nature of the offenses and the utter lack of adult presence in the locker room."

Schools Superintendent Jack Smith said last week that the school system would be looking into issues of supervision at Damascus after the police complete their work. "Some actions" have already been taken "with adults," he said, not clarifying who may have been affected or what was done. "Those are personnel issues at this point," he said.

The school system is also looking into whether a culture of hazing and bullying is widespread in Montgomery's 25 high schools. Officials have asked coaches, athletic directors and student-activity sponsors to discuss the issue with students to learn more about the nature and extent of problems.

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