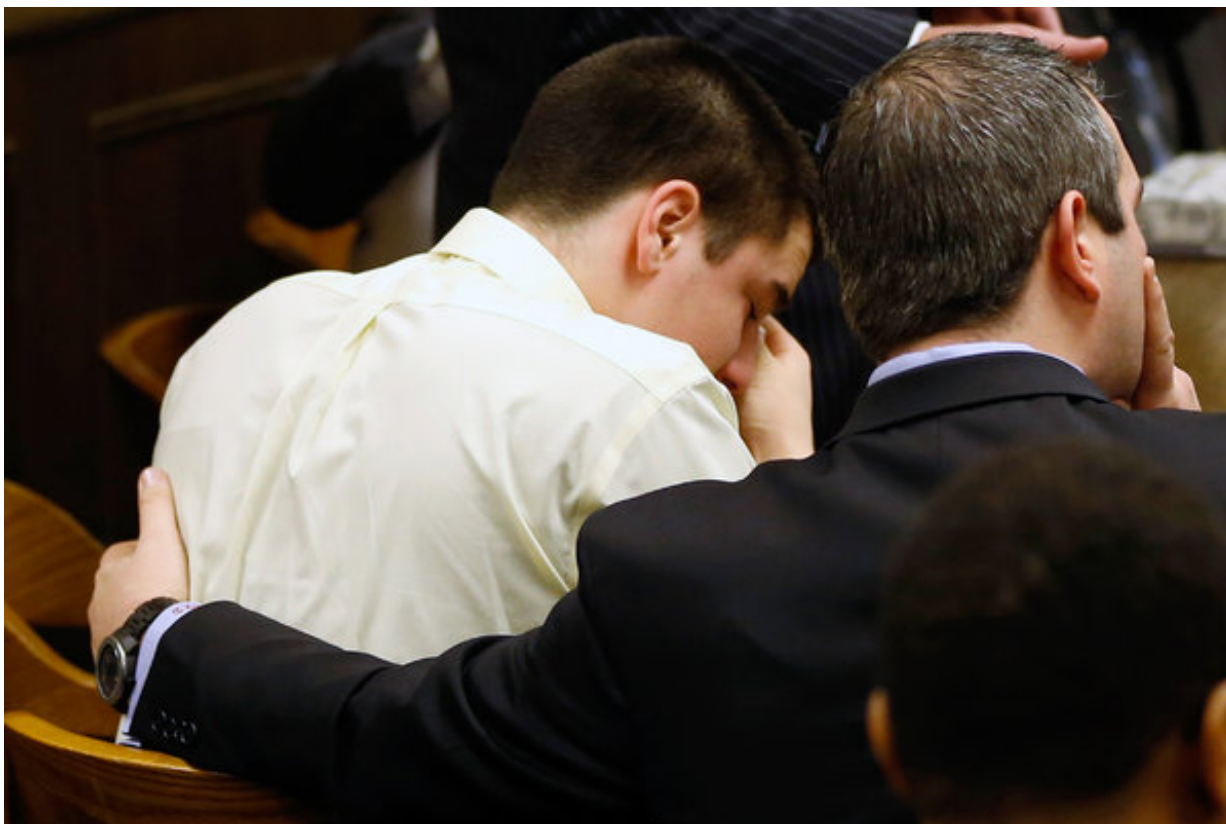


# Ohio Teenagers Guilty in Rape That Social Media Brought to Light



Pool photo by Keith Srakocic

Trent Mays, left, reacted as his guilty verdict was read in Steubenville, Ohio, on Sunday.

By [RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.](#)

Published: March 17, 2013 | [1099 Comments](#)

**STEUBENVILLE, Ohio** — Two high school football stars were found guilty on Sunday of raping a 16-year-old girl last summer in a case that drew national attention for the way social media spurred the initial prosecution and later helped galvanize national outrage.

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Because the victim did not remember what had happened, scores of text messages and cellphone pictures provided much of the evidence. They were proof as well, some said, that

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Ma'lik Richmond, right, and Trent Mays, center, were found guilty of rape.

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The courtroom in Steubenville, Ohio, on Sunday as Mr. Mays, 17, and Mr. Richmond, 16, were found guilty in the rape of a 16-year-old girl.

Steubenville High School's powerhouse football team held too much sway over other teenagers, who documented and traded pictures of the assault while doing little or nothing to protect the girl.



One of the football players, Trent Mays, 17, who had been a quarterback, was sentenced to serve at least two years in the state juvenile system. The other, Ma'lik Richmond, 16, who had played wide receiver, was sentenced to serve at least one year. Both could end up in juvenile jail until they are 21, at the discretion of the State Department of Youth Services.

Mr. Mays's minimum sentence is twice as long as Mr. Richmond's because he was found to be delinquent beyond a reasonable doubt — the juvenile equivalent of guilty — not just of rape but also of distributing a nude image of a minor.

After Judge Thomas Lipps read his decision in Juvenile Court, both boys sobbed. Mr. Richmond told his lawyer, Walter Madison, "My life is over."

Mr. Mays apologized to the victim by name, as well as to her family and the community. "No pictures should have been sent around, let alone ever taken," he said.

Mr. Richmond then walked toward the family and said: "I had not intended to do anything like this. I'm sorry to put you through this." After that he broke down, unable to speak, and embraced a court officer.

The judge found that both boys used their fingers to penetrate the girl in the early hours of Aug. 12 while she was so drunk that she lacked the cognitive ability to give her consent for sex. A picture that was circulated among classmates later that day showed the victim naked and

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Judge Thomas Lipps

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passed out. Ohio's legal definition of rape includes digital penetration.

Judge Lipps described much of the evidence as "profane and ugly." In sentencing the boys, he said rape was among the gravest of crimes and noted that they could have been tried as adults with far harsher punishments. He also said the case was a cautionary lesson in how teenagers conduct themselves when alcohol is present and in "how you record things on social media that are so prevalent today."

The trial also exposed the behavior of other teenagers, who wasted no time spreading photos and text messages with what many in the community felt was callousness or cruelty.

And that aspect of the case may not be complete. The Ohio attorney general, [Mike DeWine](#), said after the verdict that he would convene a grand jury next month to finish the

investigation.

In an interview, Mr. DeWine said that while it was not clear that more people would face charges, prosecutors might consider offenses that include obstruction of justice, failure to report a felony and failure to report child abuse. State officials have interviewed almost 60 people — students, coaches, school officials and parents — but 16, most of them juveniles, have refused to speak to investigators.

The verdict came after four days of testimony that was notable for how Ohio investigators analyzed hundreds of text messages from more than a dozen cellphones and created something like a real-time accounting of the assault.

As these messages were read aloud, Judge Lipps heard Mr. Mays state that he had used his fingers to penetrate the girl, whom he referred to in a separate message as "like a dead body." In another message, Mr. Mays admitted to the girl that he had taken the picture, already circulated among other students, of her lying naked in a basement with what he told her was his semen on her body, from what he stated was a consensual sex act.

Other text messages suggested that Mr. Mays had grown increasingly worried within a

day or two, urging a friend to curb the distribution of a video related to the assault. He also seemed to try to orchestrate a cover-up, telling a friend, “Just say she came to your house and passed out.”

Finally, the messages showed Mr. Mays pleading with the girl not to press charges because doing so would damage his football career — even as the girl grew angry that he seemed to care more about football than her welfare.

On Saturday, the girl testified that for the roughly six-hour period during which the rapes occurred, she had no memory of anything aside from a brief vomiting episode. She said she had woken up the next morning naked in the basement living room surrounded by Mr. Mays, Mr. Richmond and another boy, with no idea where she was or how she had gotten there and unable to find her underwear, shoes, earrings or phone.

One classmate testified that he had seen Mr. Mays also penetrate the girl while they rode in the back seat of a car.

Far more evidence and testimony were about Mr. Mays. Mr. Richmond mainly faced the testimony of Evan Westlake, another student, who said Mr. Richmond had used his fingers to penetrate the girl while she lay in the basement.

Testimony also touched the high school’s football coach, Reno Saccoccia, who had been criticized by some in the community for not doing more to discipline other players present. In one text message, Mr. Mays stated that he felt he had gotten the coach to “take care of it” and that Mr. Saccoccia “was joking about it so I’m not that worried.”

In the end, the most powerful evidence may have been the two hours of testimony from the 16-year-old girl herself. Under questioning from the prosecution, she told the story of waking up confused, naked, ashamed and worried, and then finding out that day that many of her friends had an idea what had happened to her or had even seen a picture of her naked. The girl also testified that she had come to realize that Mr. Mays — who maintained that he had taken care of her while she was drunk and that their encounter had been consensual and did not involve penetration — had done far more.

“This is the most pointless thing,” Mr. Mays said in one text message to the girl. “I’m going to get in trouble for something I should be getting thanked for taking care of you.”

But the girl made clear that she was not having any more of it, telling Mr. Mays in

another exchange: “It’s on YouTube. I’m not stupid. Stop texting me.”