

Suspect Acquitted Of Rape

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The pivotal question Tuesday in the rape trial of a 25-year-old Gainesville man became a matter of whose word was more trustworthy, that of an 11-year-old highly articulate schoolgirl, or the deep-voiced man charged with raping her.

Jurors decided against the girl and returned a verdict of not guilty after a half day of testimony in the trial of Thaddeus Timothy "T.T." Watson of 1624 SE 12th St. Watson had been arrested on Jan. 21, after the girl's 18-year-old sister reported the alleged rape to the youth services workers at the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. The older woman had been told of the alleged rape by playmates of her younger sister.

The girl said she had not reported the alleged rape because she was frightened her mother might think she'd done something wrong and whip her.

If convicted, Watson faced a possible 25 years to life in prison for the capital offense of raping a child age 11 or younger.

Defense attorney John Carlin had worked at discrediting the girl's claim that Watson had molested and then raped her in the living room of her southeast Gainesville residence while her 8-year-old brother sat nearby — unaware — watching television. Carlin called Watson and a friend

of the girl to testify that the youngster was not known for telling the truth and to show discrepancies in the child's story.

Watson claimed the girl had gotten angry with him after he refused her request for money. Carlin advanced the theory that the girl made up the rape story after hearing about another of her friends who'd been raped.

Under examination by both Carlin and prosecutor Greg McMahon, the girl remained highly poised and unruffled during her testimony. She related how her mother, celebrating her birthday a day late, had gone to dinner with a friend shortly after Watson arrived at the house about 7 or 7:30 p.m. Jan. 15. The three young children were under supervision of the 18-year-old.

The girl claimed Watson requested she braid his hair, but Watson countered the young victim had made the unusual request to braid his hair. According to the girl, Watson then had her sit on his lap and raped her. Watson's explanation was that the girl sat in his lap without his approval and he removed her.

Carlin had questioned how the girl's older sister, a community college student, could walk through the living room without noticing anything unusual. The woman, who had been gone to a downstairs apartment for about seven minutes, said she noticed her sister sitting in Watson's lap, gave her a frowning look, and went to her room to study.