

Aggressive Defense in Molestation Case; The attorney for a gene expert accused of abuse says he was framed by the accuser's mother.

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Reading the court file, it's hard to tell who stands accused.

William French Anderson, the renowned USC gene therapy pioneer charged with child sexual abuse, or his accuser and her mother, whom Anderson's lawyer contends instigated the case to smear the scientific genius?

After two years of waiting, and with his trial set for June 15, Anderson's defense team has flooded Los Angeles County Superior Court with papers outlining a remarkably aggressive -- and risky -- strategy.

The mother, Anderson's friend, colleague, confidant and second in command at USC Gene Therapy Laboratories, the lab he created, framed him to advance her own career and fortune, Anderson's lawyer, Barry Tarlow said during a pretrial court hearing Friday.

The woman is dishonest, untrustworthy, manipulative and vindictive, Tarlow alleged. She conspired with her daughter, now a college student, "to destroy French Anderson and obtain access to Gene Therapy patents and create a business she believed would unjustly enrich her by tens of millions of dollars," according to defense documents.

Tarlow alleges that the mother, a native of China and a naturalized U.S. citizen, conspired to steal Anderson's patents with the help of a company that is owned by the Chinese army.

Anderson, 70, a world-class martial-arts expert, is accused of molesting his colleague's daughter starting when the accuser was 10 in 1997. The alleged abuse took place during karate lessons at his San Marino home.

Anderson earned a prominent place in medical history when he led a team that cured a hereditary disease of the immune system in a 4-year-old girl in 1990. Doctors added a missing gene to her own white blood cells and reinfused them into her body. It was the first time that gene therapy had been successful in humans.

Anderson remains on leave from his duties as head of the lab. He is mildly dyslexic, according to biographers, but holds more than a dozen patents and has an IQ of 178. He is a crack pistol

shot who is known for his generous support of local police in San Marino.

Against the defense theories, prosecutors said, they will present testimony from several witnesses -- as well as the surreptitiously recorded words of the defendant himself.

There is the accuser, a scholar-athlete; a man who says Anderson molested him under similar circumstances when he worked at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland; and three of the accuser's high school friends, who prosecutors say will testify that she told them before she went to police that Anderson had molested her.

A law passed after the first allegations of child molestation against pop singer Michael Jackson allows prosecutors to introduce allegations of previous abuse by Anderson, even though they did not result in a conviction. A teacher will testify that the accuser wrote "discreetly" on several assignments inquiring about what would happen if she reported that she had been molested, prosecutors say.

Finally, there is the tape of a three-minute conversation between Anderson and the accuser. Police arranged for her to secretly record the conversation outside the South Pasadena Public Library.

Anderson, they said, is heard repeating seven times that he is sorry.

"What can I say?" Anderson responded when the girl said she needed closure, according to a transcript of the conversation entered in the court record. "I don't know why -- some, something bad in me came out and I just don't know why."

Anderson referred to that "something" as evil, but also professed eternal love for the girl, then 16: "I love you for the rest of my life.

"I told you, I will love you forever. To hurt somebody -- to damage somebody you love -- is the worst thing you can do."

The Times generally does not identify alleged sexual abuse victims to protect their privacy.

Tarlow, a well-known Southern California defense attorney, risks offending jurors by attacking a young accuser whose testimony the panel will hear, legal experts said.

During the pretrial skirmish Friday, each side in the downtown

courtroom of Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Michael E. Pastor verbally slashed the other's case.

Tarlow said the mother was "motivated by blind ambition and money" and lied to frame Anderson.

At the request of the prosecutor, Deputy Dist. Atty. Cathryn Brougham, Pastor said he would limit attacks on the mother's character to issues that wouldn't "distract" the jury. But the judge also said he would not "gut" the defense.

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California; Metro Desk

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781 Words

06 June 2006

Los Angeles Times

Home Edition

B-7

English