

# Jury says Neviaser not guilty of counts

## Deliberations ran into night

By Elaine Gaston  
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CONWAY — Former Loris physician Jules Neviaser was acquitted on all counts of sexual assault after a jury reached its verdicts late Monday night.



Neviaser

The 61-year-old orthopedic surgeon had been accused of fondling and molesting 17 female patients during examinations in his doctor's office beginning in 1989.

The six-man, six-woman jury returned not guilty verdicts on all 17 counts of assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature against the doctor. If convicted, Neviaser could have faced up to 10 years on each count.

The verdicts were reached just before midnight. Neviaser hugged his attorneys and his wife, then shook hands with Circuit Judge R. Markley Dennis Jr.

Neviaser refused to comment to reporters. He still has other indictments pending, including five criminal sexual conduct charges.

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Many of the women who had accused Neviaser cried after the verdicts, one by one, were read aloud in court.

"He's going to burn in hell and I want to be there on judgment day when God says, 'You did it and you know you did it,'" said one woman.

Some of the women were so upset that they had to be helped out of the courthouse.

"I'm totally shocked because I believe in God and I know I was telling the truth," said another woman, in tears.

A third woman said: "Justice sucks, the system doesn't work."

Defense attorney Morgan Martin said the case evolved from a "social hysteria" with no evidence to back up the allegations.

"One cries 'fire' and everyone runs for the door," Martin said.

Solicitor Ralph Wilson said he worried about the verdict's impact.

"What really scares me is what this says for other women who are being abused by authority figures," Wilson said early this morning. "They're not going to want to come forward and have to face this kind of ridicule, first at the hands of the defendant and second at the hands of the system."

Wilson said he would be reviewing the additional charges against Neviaser to decide whether to pursue them.

Earlier Monday, Neviaser chose

# Jury finds Neviaser not guilty on all counts of assault

## TRIAL

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not to take the witness stand in his own defense.

Seventeen women who testified for the prosecution during the six-day trial told similar accounts of being molested by Neviaser during various exercises he performed while examining them for complaints of muscle or bone injuries. Most described having their breasts fondled or having their hands or faces manipulated to rub against the doctor's crotch area.

Others testified Neviaser rubbed his erect penis against their buttocks while he had them bend over and touch their toes or kneel in a chair as part of an examination.

"This is a case about the powerful and the powerless," Wilson said during closing arguments in the case on Monday. "These victims were nothing to him. They were 'nobodys.' He could use and take advantage of them at will. People like Neviaser prey on the weak, on the less-educated, on people who are powerless."

A key piece of evidence for the

prosecution was a videotape recorded by a former patient who snuck in a hidden video camera in her purse on a visit to the doctor. The woman was the first to accuse the doctor of molestation.

The videotape shows the doctor conducting various exercises on the patient, who had been asked to remove her bra for the examination. But the alleged assaults could not be seen in the videotape because of the position of the camera, which obscured the view.

The defense claimed Neviaser had performed proper examinations and that any touching was accidental, not intentional. They maintained the women had misinterpreted the exercises, misrepresented the truth and had overactive imaginations.

The women came forward with allegations against the doctor after reading about details in newspaper accounts of Neviaser's arrest in March 1994, the defense maintained.

The mounting allegations were a result of "paranoia," Martin suggested during his closing arguments.

"They were taking things out of context," Martin said.

Martin painted his client as a "rough" and "brusque" doctor, but not a criminal.

"Maybe he wasn't always careful," Martin told the jurors. "He needed to communicate better. Maybe he needed to be more sensitive. They may not be admirable traits for a doctor, but it ain't criminal."

The defense spent two days presenting its case to the jury.

In their case, they used two videotapes recorded by undercover agents working with the police, who posed as patients and visited the doctor in November 1993, and December 1993. The two women testified the doctor never sexually assaulted them.

"These videotapes point to the doctor's innocence," Martin told the jurors.

The solicitor maintained the doctor knew he was being investigated and had changed his behavior.

Several of Neviaser's former patients, who testified for the defense, said the doctor never sexually assaulted them.

The solicitor, however, said many of the defense's witnesses were friends of the doctor's or had family

members who knew him.

It was also the defense's contention that many of the alleged victims were motivated by money, referring to several civil lawsuits filed by many of Neviaser's accusers. They questioned why many of the women continued treatment with the doctor, and why many waited to report the alleged assaults.

The solicitor maintained that the women told family and friends. And some told their attorneys, who advised the women to do nothing, that it would be their word against the doctor's, the solicitor said. He also said Neviaser's first accuser reported the doctor to police, but that authorities "did nothing."

"They have now been molested twice," Wilson said during closing arguments. "Once in the office of Neviaser, and now by this system. Is it any wonder these women didn't want to come forward?"

"It took them the second or third visit to accept the fact they were being violated by this person," Wilson said. "You know why they weren't certain? Because he is a doctor. You trust your doctor. That's what makes this so egregious."

*Staff writer Melissa Huff Salvatore contributed to this report.*