

CLAYTON

'Free' Grills Detective; Move In for the Kill

Peppered with questions on the witness stand from noted barrister Scott "Free" Rosenblum, a retired Clayton police detective acknowledged Friday that Daniel Hughes never uttered a confession to molesting a child at the Ritz-Carlton hotel even though a police report claims he did.

For many long, tense minutes on the fifth day of Mr. Hughes' trial in court here, the former investigator, Jeff Brinkley, flipped through a transcript of the interrogation, trying to find the words he had ascribed to Mr. Hughes. He couldn't.

Mr. Brinkley then admitted that he actually had relied on non-verbal cues — a subtle head nodding at the end of three hours of questioning — to support his claim that Mr. Hughes fessed up to touching a 9-year-old girl between her legs.

How Mr. Hughes, now 45, touched the girl is the principal point of contention. Both sides agree that he arrived hammered at the hotel in Clayton early the morning of March 6, 2011, gave the wrong room number to a desk clerk who supplied a key, and climbed into an occupied bed!

Mr. Rosenblum has told the jury that Mr. Hughes thought she must be a woman who accompanied his drinking buddies to the room, but that he never touched her sexually.

"He didn't say he touched her between her legs, did he?" asked the always dapper Mr. Rosenblum while quizzing Mr. Brinkley on the police report that led to charges of child molestation and sodomy.

"He didn't say he didn't," Mr. Brinkley responded, drawing audible gasps from Mr. Hughes' family and friends in the courtroom.

It was one of many heated moments during the cross-examination of the former detective.

"Where did he tell you he touched her between her legs?" Mr. Rosenblum asked, at another point.

"I believe at some point he said he reached between her legs," Mr. Brinkley responded.

"Find it," Mr. Rosenblum suggested tersely.

After several more minutes of silence, punctuated only by the sound of pages turning, Mr. Rosenblum said: "You can't find it, can you? You know why you

Mr. Brinkley tried to make the excuse that the report was a summary and his interpretation of the interrogation.

But Mr. Rosenblum adroitly countered that Mr. Hughes had by then been without sleep for 27 hours.

And he asked Mr. Brinkley why police only obtained Mr. Hughes' blood alcohol content after that interview. Mr. Hughes, who had been in their custody for six hours at that point, registered a 0.079 — just below the level of impairment for driving. The incident at the hotel occurred between 3:30 and 4:30 a.m.

Mr. Brinkley said that he did not need a blood-alcohol test to know Mr. Hughes was sober enough to be aware of his rights and to understand the questions. He insisted that Mr. Hughes didn't seem at all impaired and wasn't slurring his words.

"You want to base your credibility on that?" Mr. Rosenblum asked.

"Yes," Mr. Brinkley replied.

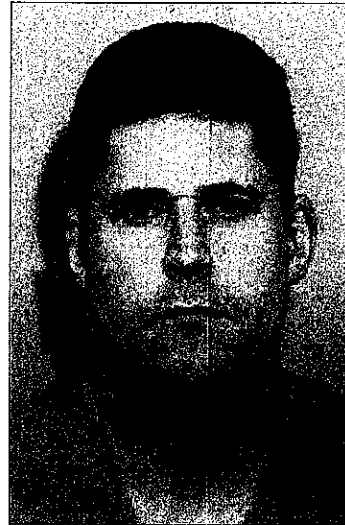
Mr. Rosenblum glanced at the stunned jurors, who on Thursday had watched the videotape of the interrogation, and flipped the pen in his hand.

Mr. Brinkley had throughout the interrogation stated what he believed had happened, seeking confirmation from Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Hughes was not told the girl's age until the very end, at which point he is seen burying his head in his hands, and expressing shock.

Earlier Friday, the girl's parents, who live in St. Louis County, testified about the horror of having their daughter wake them to say there was a man in her bed.

They said their daughter told them immediately that Mr. Hughes had touched her between her legs.



Daniel Hughes



Scott "Free" Rosenblum

ther recalled his wife shouting, when they discovered Mr. Hughes standing in his underwear in the adjoining room!

The mother, a petite woman, began pushing Mr. Hughes toward the door. Her husband helped. Then he grabbed a belt from the pants Mr. Hughes had left behind and started going after him. Security arrived before the confrontation went further.

The girl, now 12, testified Wednesday that she awoke as Mr. Hughes was touching her inappropriately, and that she didn't say anything while it was happening because she was terrified. There are disputes over how dark the room was.

Mr. Hughes, of Conshohocken, Pa., had been here on a business trip as an employee of Enterprise Fleet Management, which subsequently fired him.

The girl's family has filed a lawsuit seeking at least \$5 million in damages from the hotel chain and that property's owner.

Mr. Hughes' trial is scheduled to continue this