

'Jekyll-and-Hyde' rapist gets 89 years in prison

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Declaring "there's no excuse for what I've done," John William Jackson, the Santa Cruz man who kidnapped and sexually assaulted two women in Santa Cruz in 1986, was sentenced yesterday to 89 years in prison.

Jackson, 31, must serve at least half that term before becoming eligible for parole, at age 76.

In imposing the stiffest sentence available to him by law, Superior Court Judge Bill Kelsay cited the "cruel, callous" nature of the crimes, the forethought involved in planning them, and Jackson's previous convictions for sex offenses (he was on parole for rape at the time of the 1986 attacks).

Kelsay's pronouncement of sentence followed an emotional confrontation of Jackson by his victims and Jackson's apology,

as well as a characterization of the repeat sex-offender by his attorney as a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" personality who changes from a mild-mannered, caring man, holding a job as a roofer, into a brutal rapist when under the influence of drugs.

It capped a two-week trial marked by controversy and left the attorneys for both sides claiming that the 89-year sentence vindicated their respective courses of action.

Jackson, who held his head in his hands and seemed on the verge of tears for most of the proceedings, seemed to exhibit genuine remorse for his crimes, Kelsay noted in a pre-sentencing statement.

What was ironic to him, Kelsay said, was that Jackson had been convicted repeatedly in the past for similar assaults (he went to prison four times in the last 10 years for sexual assaults and drug charges), and each time he had displayed

genuine remorse.

"It's not uncommon," Kelsay concluded, "for people who cause the ultimate degradation of women to exhibit remorse and yet still continue to do it."

The two incidents for which Jackson was convicted occurred within days of each other last August.

In the first incident, Jackson pulled a woman from her car at the county complex on Emeline Street and drove her around for

3½ hours at gunpoint to remote locations, where he forced her to perform repeated sex acts while he injected cocaine.

In the second attack, Jackson went to another woman's Bran-ciforte Drive home and asked to use the telephone. When she let him in, he tied her up, blind-folded her and threatened her with a knife before driving her to a vacant house, where he sexually assaulted her and took

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her money.

Jackson was identified by a piece of paper with his name and address on it that he inadvertently left at the scene of the second attack.

Jackson's attorney, Deputy Public Defender Ben Rice, said he could offer no legal or moral defense for his client's acts. They were done, he said, by a "sick man," one side of which is gentle and caring and feels remorse.

"It's that side of him that will be sitting in prison for the rest of his life," Rice said.

Before Kelsay pronounced sentence, both victims stood to read statements to the court. The 27-year-old victim of the Branciforte Drive attack addressed Jackson as well as the judge.

"That day," she said, "was the beginning of a living nightmare that has destroyed me as a person ... It has destroyed my self-esteem and respect for myself and taken away my will to live.

"This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life — explaining here to everyone, and especially to you, John Jackson, ... the hole this has left in my heart. You can never take away from me what you've done to me, for I'll be scarred for life."

Making an effort to hold back tears, the woman concluded, "I'd like to ask John Jackson if there's anything he'd like to say to me."

Jackson, in a bright orange jail-issue jumpsuit and with his ankles shackled together, heaved himself to his feet as if he were physically lifting a great weight, and turned hesitantly to face his victims.

"I don't know why I did what I did to you," he said. "Maybe it was the drugs I was on, or the stress. I hope some day with God's help you'll be able to recoup from what I did."

The sentencing capped a controversial two-week trial that Jackson's attorney insisted need never have been held.

Jackson had offered to plead guilty to 12 of the 15 offenses with which he was charged (multiple counts of kidnapping, assault, and forced oral copulation) and bring four of the five remaining counts before Judge Kelsay for a bench (juryless) trial.

Rice said a jury trial would not only cost the county extra money, it would cause Jackson's victims the unnecessary suffering of reliving their humiliation in front of a jury.

In exchange for his plea, Jackson asked that he be found not guilty on the fifth charge, kidnapping to commit a robbery, which carries a mandatory life sentence.

The District Attorney's Office, in a controversial move, turned down Rice's request and insisted on a jury trial, igniting a controversy that led to mudslinging by both attorneys and ultimately to Judge Kelsay's imposing a gag order on the attorneys for the remainder of the trial.