

O.J. Simpson this ain't—the coming Michael Jackson circus

By Joel Meggs

In 1994, the O.J. Simpson trial forever changed the face of television news coverage. The trial was covered every day by every major network news outlet, and CNN broadcast the trial live most days.

And while the events of the past days may suggest that Michael Jackson's troubles have all the trappings of the next "Trial of the Century," I assure you that this will not be O.J. Part II. For one thing, not even in California would a judge allow these proceedings to be televised. The 12-year-old complainant is reportedly ready to testify for the prosecution, but the judge is likely to take all precautions to shield this witness's identity.

And the attractiveness of the story will likely diminish once the trial is underway and specific allegations begin surfacing regarding Jackson's conduct with these children.

Case in point, the 1993 civil proceedings that were dropped when Michael Jackson paid off the family of the complainant. The sworn statements given in those proceedings allege that Jackson lured the complainant, J. Chandler, into his confidence and then had the boy masturbate him and perform oral copulation on Jackson. One statement paragraph out of a sworn statement reads that, "Michael Jackson had me suck one nipple and twist the other nipple while Michael Jackson masturbated. On one occasion when Michael Jackson and I were in bed together Michael Jackson grabbed my buttock and kissed me and put his tongue in my ear. I told him I didn't like that. Michael Jackson started to cry."

The entire statement is extremely graphic and extremely disturbing. With the King of Pop now poised to meet charges of "lewd

or lascivious acts with a child under 14" head on, the networks are not apt to want to cover the trial in the same in-depth, every-detail-counts manner in which the O.J. Simpson trial was covered. That trial, with its emphasis on forensic evidence and conspiracy theory, was the stuff network exec's dreams are made of. The fun is simply sucked out of a celebrity trial when instead of two dead bodies there are violated children.

The child's testimony will definitely be a big part of the trial. Under California law, complainants in criminal proceedings involving sex crimes are compellable. This is a somewhat new development, brought on in large part by Jackson himself; in 1994, when Jackson settled with J. Chandler during the civil proceedings, criminal proceedings were precluded because of the nature of the settlement and the complainant's unwillingness to testify. In response, a new law was passed that made witnesses in criminal proceedings compellable regardless of any civil settlements.

Reports suggest that the complainant in this case is not interested in a civil suit, is cooperating fully with the prosecutors, and is eager to take the stand. If no other complainants come forward and the charges against Jackson are bolstered only by this one child's allegations, then the trial will quickly devolve into a credibility contest, which tends not to make for good television. It might also be possible that, given the complainant's age and the content of his testimony, that much of the trial will be held in camera and subject to publicity ban. You aren't likely to get day-by-day breakdowns of the day's events in the Jackson trial. Nor would you want to. To prove the charges against Jackson, prosecutors will have to show that Jackson intentionally used the child to arouse, appeal to, or gratify Jackson's lust,



passions or sexual desires. If J. Chandler's sworn statements are any indication, this will not be testimony for mass consumption. From the brief filed with the L.A. County Superior Court of California: "These sexually offensive contacts include, but are not limited to, defendant Michael Jackson orally copulating plaintiff, defendant Michael Jackson masturbating plaintiff, defendant Michael Jackson eating the seaman of plaintiff, and defendant Michael Jackson having plaintiff fondle and manipulate the breasts and nipples of defendant Michael Jackson while defendant Michael Jackson would masturbate."

While one might think that a trial involving the King of Pop and allegations of molestation would be infinitely interesting, given Jackson's

past eccentric behaviour and his bizarre appearance, this trial will quickly fall from the monologues of late-night talk shows. It will be sad and it will be disturbing. It will be less about the bizarre and eccentric Michael Jackson than it will be about the lost innocence of a 12-year-old boy, who wanted nothing more than to meet and spend time with a music legend in a place called Neverland, and instead was violated in a vile and reprehensible way. The trial will focus on the mental and emotional duress that Jackson subjected the boy to, and how the boy will likely be dealing with the resulting psychological problems for the rest of his life. It certainly won't be the kind of trial that the media will relish or celebrate the way they did O.J. Simpson's.