

# **HEAVY-WRECKER TRUCK OPERATOR ON TRIAL IN DEATH OF OSU STUDENT**

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## **NEWS 05C**

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### **THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH**

The sight of the 20-pound block-pulley on the witness stand was enough for the parents of Danielle Knapp to look away.

The piece from a *heavy-wrecker* truck caused their 22-year-old daughter's death last year when, on the night of Jan. 13, 2005, it flew off a strained wire and through the windshield of her car as she drove on the south Outerbelt.

Witnesses said Knapp died instantly, her car rolling to a stop in the median near the Grove City exit. She had been struck in the chest and neck.

The truck operator, William Peck, 35, is charged with reckless homicide for failing to realize his 3-ton rated pulley could not have budged a double-box, 32-ton tractor-trailer stuck in the mud.

If convicted, the charge carries a maximum five years in prison.

Defense attorney Robert Krapenc told the judge yesterday that his client could not have foreseen the tragedy.

"In an instant, that snatch block broke, causing this terrible, terrible accident," Krapenc said. "The state will absolutely have no evidence that this was a known risk."

The trial in Franklin County Common Pleas Court is being heard by Judge Michael J. Holbrook without a jury.

James and Laronda Knapp came to the trial with a photo of their daughter imprinted on a T-shirt and a poem she wrote on the back. Danielle Knapp, a senior animal-science major at Ohio State University, was on her way home from her job about 8:30 p.m. when the accident happened.

Another motorist, Sarah Woodall, testified that Knapp's 2004 Grand Prix was ahead of her on I-270 when the driver suddenly lost control, spun in front of her and left the road.

"I thought she had hydroplaned because it was raining really heavy that night," Woodall said.

Off-duty Columbus police Officer Dredrick Lane testified that he was a friend of the owner of Extreme Towing and had received a call from Peck, who was driving a truck too small for the job. Lane, who has a commercial license, agreed to drive the *heavy wrecker* to the scene.

As Lane watched, Peck hooked the tractor-trailer to a guy wire and winch mechanism to pull the rig free when the pulley broke.

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**Illustration:** Photo appeared in newspaper, not in the archive.

**Photo caption:** (1) TOM DODGE| DISPATCH

James and Laronda Knapp listen to testimony in the trial regarding the death of their daughter. Lending support yesterday was Leitha Maxey, left, of the Victim Witness Assistance Program.

(2) William Peck is charged with reckless homicide in the death of Danielle Knapp, who was killed by the block pulley from Peck's truck.

(3) Knapp