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## DNA results cast doubt on sex assault case

**The suspect, who had been in jail since April based on the victim's identification, was released after preliminary tests indicated that DNA found on the victim is from another man.**

By Jack Leonard

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A 40-year-old man who spent more than five months in Los Angeles County jail accused of sexually assaulting a Santa Monica College student on campus was released Thursday after DNA tests threw the case into doubt.

Chase Guy Reynolds, who was living in Topanga when he was arrested April 7, was charged after the 18-year-old student identified him as the man who attacked her near the restrooms in the college's library building.

The woman told police that the assailant robbed her, licked her stomach and sexually assaulted her, according to court documents. But lab tests show that DNA found on the woman's stomach and breasts did not belong to Reynolds but to another man, a prosecutor said in court Thursday.

L.A. County Deputy Dist. Atty. Christi Frey said a Santa Monica police detective told her about the test result late Wednesday, shortly after a hearing in which Reynolds had unsuccessfully asked to be released without bail.

The test results are preliminary, Frey said, and investigators and prosecutors are trying to determine who the DNA belonged to and whether the district attorney's office should continue with its case or drop the charges against Reynolds.

"At this point, I don't feel comfortable with Mr. Reynolds remaining in jail," she told Superior Court Judge Kathryn Solorzano.

Solorzano told Reynolds that she would release him from the Airport Courthouse, where Thursday afternoon's hearing took place, but warned him not to contact witnesses in the case.

"I know that you're very upset," she said.

Reynolds, who sat in blue jail scrubs, assured the judge he would follow her instructions and thanked her. He was released late Thursday afternoon.

Defense attorney Gregory P. Humphries welcomed the decision by prosecutors but said he wished it had come earlier for his client, who has no criminal record.

"He's innocent. He wasn't there," Humphries said.

Frey declined to comment on the case while it is ongoing. Prosecutors are scheduled to present their evidence against Reynolds in court for the first time at a preliminary hearing next month. The charges carry a maximum sentence of 13 years in prison.

In court papers, Humphries has attacked the case against Reynolds, who had once enrolled at the college and was still sitting in on classes.

Security camera footage taken from the college's business school shows Reynolds leaving that building about 40 minutes before the attack wearing a blue shirt and black pants, according to court records filed by the defense. The victim told police her assailant was wearing a green button-down shirt and khaki pants.

The victim also described her attacker as 5-foot-10, 175 pounds, cleanshaven with dark brown eyes. Reynolds is 5-foot-7, 140 pounds, has blue eyes and was not cleanshaven at the time, according to the defense documents.

Security footage obtained from the library does not show Reynolds entering or leaving the building that day, the documents said. And while the most recent DNA tests came from the L.A. County sheriff's crime lab, earlier tests by the California Department of Justice also raised significant doubts about the case.

The victim told police that her attacker licked her navel area, according to court documents. But the state's crime lab found that the only DNA consistent with saliva in the woman's navel area belonged to her.

Other male DNA evidence found on the student's stomach was inconsistent with saliva, the court papers state.

Tawni Tyndall, a private investigator working for Humphries on the case, faulted authorities for focusing on Reynolds despite evidence pointing to his innocence.

"He's been sitting in jail since April 7," Tyndall said. "It's an outrage. And it could happen to anybody."

Santa Monica police officials could not be reached for comment.

[jack.leonard@latimes.com](mailto:jack.leonard@latimes.com)

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