

Simpson's lawyers question DNA tests

Defense attacks police methods, alleges mistakes

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Defense lawyers attacked the reliability of DNA evidence in the O.J. Simpson case Tuesday, suggesting police bungled blood collection, mislabeled a sample and assigned inexperienced technicians to the case.

Under defense questioning, one police criminologist acknowledged mislabeling a blood sample and another said she was still a trainee when she collected evidence in the double-murder case.

Superior Court Judge Lance Ito repeatedly tried to rein in the detailed questioning at a hearing that had been called only to consider whether the defense would be allowed to conduct its own tests on newly disclosed blood samples.

"That is for another hearing," Ito said of the broader line of questioning, and he sustained some objections by Deputy District Attorney Lisa Kahn.

Simpson, 47, pleaded innocent to the June 12 killings of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. His trial is scheduled Sept. 19.

Police criminologist Collin Yamauchi told defense attorney Barry Scheck he mislabeled one blood sample.

But Yamauchi insisted he took pains to protect evidence, even going so far as to avoid touching blood-soaked swatches with a ruler while measuring them.

"I didn't want to risk contamination so I made approximations," he said. "I tried to avoid touching them as much as possible."

Yamauchi, who performed some of the earliest tests on the Simpson blood samples, also acknowledged his first experience in DNA testing was six months ago.

A second criminologist, Andrea Mazzola, testified she was still a trainee when she was sent to collect evidence.

"I went out to the crime scenes with more experienced criminologists and assisted them," said Mazzola, who was hired in January.

Asked to detail the number of crime scenes in which she had primary responsibility for collecting evidence, she replied: "Zero."

Her testimony also suggested she began

collecting blood samples from Simpson's driveway before a search warrant was issued.

She said she arrived at 7 a.m. on June 13, met with detectives who pointed out items of interest and "proceeded to have them photographed and collected." The search warrant was issued at 10:45 a.m.

Scheck and attorney Peter Neufeld, forensic specialists known throughout the country, led the defense attack against the DNA evidence, which is crucial to the case.

On Monday, prosecutors said DNA tests found the genetic makeup of Simpson's blood matched that of blood found near the bodies of Ms. Simpson and Goldman.

On Tuesday, Simpson's lawyers asked Gregory Matheson — Yamauchi's supervisor — why some blood samples were withheld from testing, something that wasn't originally revealed to the defense.

Matheson said he couldn't remember specific conversations about how much evidence could be shared with the defense. He suggested Yamauchi made the decision to hold back some samples when others were sent to a Maryland laboratory for testing.

"I don't specifically remember any discussions on this topic," Matheson said. "We may have had them. I don't know."

Health care reform may be limited

House speaker would accept 'significant if initial steps'

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Thomas Foley suggested Tuesday he could live with a limited health care bill this year or even none at all. His remarks signaled shrinking Democratic expectations in Congress for major reform.

Foley said an acceptable bill would have to "make significant if initial steps" toward insurance reform, universal health coverage and controlling costs — without aggravating the deficit or the price of insurance.

"If a bill could be found that deals with one or more of these issues in a significant way, and doesn't bar future improvements and consideration, I think that would be worth doing," Foley said at a breakfast meeting where he was asked about hypothetical courses of action.

"If that can't be done, if we

can't find a consensus, the other instance is to say we have to probably pick it up again in the next Congress," he said.

The House already has left town for its summer recess, waiting for the Senate to take the first action on health care reform. Many Democrats believe the momentum — and chances — for reform this year will be lost if senators also depart and put off action until after Labor Day.

Some have said they want the Senate kept in session until a health bill is passed. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell's intentions were unclear. Asked Tuesday about his time frame, he said he wants to pass health care "as promptly as we can."

Since winning a \$500 billion deficit reduction plan a year ago, Clinton has made health

reform the central issue of his administration. Early this year he sent Congress a comprehensive bill that would have insured all Americans and required most employers to help pay the premiums.

But the Senate has been weighing an increasingly narrower series of bills. First Clinton's ambitious plan was supplanted by a more modest Mitchell bill. That's now been overshadowed by a bipartisan group's even more restrained proposal, which emphasizes insurance reforms and deficit reduction while expanding coverage to fewer uninsured Americans.

The leaders of the so-called "mainstream" bipartisan group, Sens. John Chafee, R-R.I. and John Breaux, D-La., were shopping their plan around this week while Senate aides searched for a politically feasible compromise. Chafee briefed Republican leaders Tuesday after accompanying Breaux on Democratic rounds Monday.

Liberals and their interest-group allies continued a bar-

rage against the moderates' proposal. "This is a Trojan horse for real reform," Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, said Tuesday on the floor.

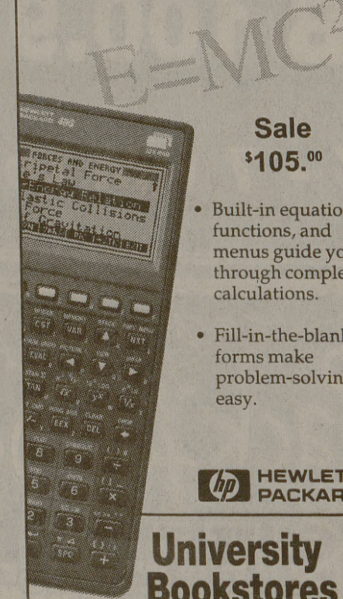
But some Democrats sounded more like Foley. "Let's not be captives of the rhetorical goals we've laid out ... if there's some way to make discernible progress," said Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., a member of the Democratic leadership.

While Daschle and others have been vowing to stay and pass some sort of bill this year, Foley suggested the situation is not that urgent.

Despite general agreement with Democrats' health-care goals, he said, the public is not clamoring for immediate reform. "There's not 'This must be done or we're going to bring down the Congress,'" he said.

Foley downplayed potential damage to Clinton if reform does not pass this year. "He's not leaving office. He's not ending his term," he said when asked if a delay would hurt Clinton.

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