

HORRY JURY AWARDS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED BOY \$15 MILLION

Sun News, The (Myrtle Beach, SC) - September 25, 1997

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An Horry County jury Wednesday awarded \$15 million to a child from Charleston County who was kidnapped and sexually assaulted four years ago by a former Coastal Carolina University student.

The incident happened June 22, 1993, in Awendaw, located in Charleston County.

Lawyers for the victim said they believe the settlement is the largest civil verdict awarded in Horry County.

"This verdict sends a message to all victims of sexual assault that a civil action is an appropriate avenue to obtain personal justice, something that is often not perceived as being obtained by victims in the criminal process," Mark Mason, the plaintiff's attorney, said Wednesday.

The 16-year-old plaintiff was represented by Mason, Anthony Forsberg and Sean Keefer of The Mason Law Firm, based in Mount Pleasant.

Bret Michael Barron, 24, drove his 1989 vehicle near the child, then a sixth-grader, who was riding a bike. Barron forced him off the road and into some nearby woods, as reported as the time T.

Then he forced the child off the bicycle at knifepoint and sodomized him.

A second incident led authorities to Coastal Carolina where Barron was a student. Authorities arrested him based on a composite sketch circulated to campus personnel, and Barron was arrested. In 1995, he pled guilty to second-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Kidnapping charges were dismissed. Barron was never charged in the second incident.

Barron, held at Lee Correctional Institute in Bishopville shortly after the hearing in 1993, did not testify in court.

Barron's lawyer, Linda Weeks Gangi of Thompson Law Firm, P.A., which has offices in Conway and Myrtle Beach, could not be reached for comment Wednesday evening.

Mason said court personnel informed him the largest previous verdict had been about \$6 million.