

Ex-Bombers president jailed for possessing child porn

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The Canadian Press

A former president of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers was sentenced to 45 days in jail and three years' probation Wednesday after pleading guilty to possessing child pornography.

Ross Brown, 72, admitted to possessing nearly 5,000 pornographic photos involving children as young as two engaged in explicit sex acts, including bondage and bestiality.

He also had 30 videos and a "PowerPoint presentation on child pornography" on two home computers, said Crown prosecutor Tony Kavanagh.

"This is proof all types of individuals from all walks of life can and do become embroiled in this exploitative crime," Kavanagh told a Winnipeg court.

"I'll be carrying this burden of shame for the rest of my life," Brown said, reading from a typewritten statement. "I want to express my deep remorse and regret for what I did. I truly appreciate and acknowledge how wrong my actions are."

Ross, a prominent Winnipeg doctor and respected community leader, was caught in an international investigation that began in 2006 with an FBI probe of a child-abuse case involving a Georgia girl, 12.

The FBI discovered a website containing modelling-type photos of the girl and learned the administrative contact was listed as a "Ross Brown." Brown's street address in Winnipeg was also listed.

FBI interviewed the girl, who told them hundreds of graphic pictures had been taken by a family friend known as "Uncle Mac" during the previous year. Police identified the man as Georgia resident Wilbur Caldwell and charged him with manufacturing child pornography. Six other men — aged 22 to 52 — were also charged with raping the girl.

Caldwell, 52, quickly pleaded guilty and received a 15-year prison sentence under a plea deal with U.S. justice authorities. To avoid a much harsher sentence, he agreed to help authorities and gave statements that led police to Brown.

Member of Bombers Hall of Fame

Brown was president of the community-owned Winnipeg Blue Bombers in 1988 when the team won the Grey Cup in Ottawa, then stayed on for another year.

He joined the Bombers organization in 1982 as a member of the team's board of directors. Brown was also a member of the 1991 Grey Cup planning committee. He was inducted into the football club's Hall of Fame in 2006.

As for his relatively short sentence, Kavanagh told court an administrative bungle forced justice officials to strike a deal with the accused. The prosecutor said Ross likely had a strong argument that his Charter of Rights and Freedoms had been violated by a nearly three-year delay in disclosing evidence and getting the case ready for court.

"This sentence is not based on the facts of the case, but on the unique aspects of the investigation," Kavanagh said.

Winnipeg police and RCMP began a joint investigation of Brown in 2006, but the case got lost in the shuffle when they disbanded their partnership in the Integrated Child Exploitation unit, Kavanagh said.

Brown's lawyer, Jeff Gindin, repeatedly demanded disclosure of evidence against his client without success. "Delay really was an issue here. There was a very real possibility of a judicial stay," he said Wednesday.