



# Prosecution: English soccer coach persistently abused boys

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LIVERPOOL, England (AP) — A former soccer coach carried out the “systematic and persistent” sexual abuse of young boys, including assaulting two youth players in the changing rooms at Crewe Alexandra, the prosecution said at the start of the trial on Tuesday.

Barry Bennell, who worked as a youth coach in northern England from the 1970s to the 1990s, is accused of 48 counts of child sexual abuse.

The 63-year-old Bennell denies the offenses of indecent assault, sodomy and attempted sodomy against 11 complainants, who were aged from eight to 14 at the time of the alleged offenses. Bennell has pleaded guilty to seven counts of indecent assault.

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Prosecutor Nicholas Johnson told a jury at Liverpool Crown Court that Bennell, who has since changed his name to Richard Jones, was a “predatory and determined pedophile” who targeted prepubescent boys.

As such, he had pretty much unfettered access to large numbers of young lads who dreamt of a life in professional football,” Johnson said. “Although it seems that Mr. Jones/Bennell was a skilled and relatively successful coach, he had a much darker side.”

Johnson said one complainant alleged he was abused in the changing rooms at the stadium at Crewe, which now plays in the fourth professional tier of English soccer. That alleged incident after a youth team game was interrupted by a teammate who Bennell then pinned against a wall and threatened he would never play soccer again if he spoke of what he witnessed.

Bennell is also alleged to have performed oral sex on another youth player in the changing rooms at Crewe.

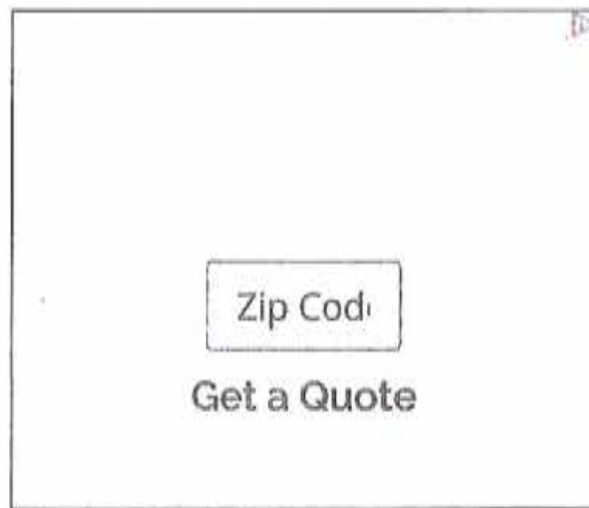
Many of the alleged offenses took place at the home addresses of Bennell, who met some of the complainants while working as a scout for Manchester City, the prosecution said.

Bennell’s home, where he would invite boys to stay, was described by one complainant as a “paradise” for young boys with a pool table, fruit machine, big televisions and unusual pets, which the court heard included a wild cat and a monkey.

Complainants also alleged being abused in his car on the way to and from training and on soccer tours.

One described staying in a house “in the middle of nowhere” on a tour where Bennell would play horror films and one of the boys would end up with a sheep’s head in his bed, the jury was told.

When interviewed about the allegations, Bennell claimed he was the victim of a “concerted effort” by people to make false allegations, according to Johnson.



During interviews, Bennell told police he had been attracted to 13-year-old boys because they were “pedigree footballers who were athletic and good looking.”

Bennell is due to appear on video-link for the trial as he needs to be frequently fed through a tube due to illness.

The trial is expected to last two months.

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