

EX-STAR WITNESS CHARGED IN \ SERIES OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS

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Michael Champion , who once escaped a possible life sentence by becoming the prized prosecution witness against a sadistic murder gang, was charged Monday with a series of sexual assaults in northwest Detroit.

Police believe Champion is the serial rapist who preyed on women living in an area bounded by Lahser, Greenfield, McNichols and Seven Mile roads since at least January. In those attacks, women were raped and robbed in their homes.

Deputy Police Chief James Younger said Champion, 32, is believed to have committed more than 20 sexual assaults on the northwest side, the last "some hours" before his arrest Saturday in Highland Park.

In a tense arraignment in 36th District Court, Champion, of Detroit, was charged with four counts of criminal sexual conduct, three counts of armed robbery and three counts of breaking and entering with intent to commit larceny.

During the proceeding, Magistrate C. Lorene Royster's face reddened when Champion talked back to her.

Staring at her as she ordered him held in Wayne County Jail on \$3 million bond pending a Sept. 8 preliminary examination, Champion leaned into a microphone and asked, "Is that it?"

Royster shot back, "Sir, I do not take these proceedings lightly!"

"I don't, either," he said.

At that point, three police officers joined three others flanking Champion.

If convicted, he would face a maximum life sentence. He is charged with:

- * First-degree criminal sex conduct, armed robbery and breaking and entering in a Jan. 30 attack on a woman in her home in the 18000 block of Oakfield.
- * First-degree criminal sexual conduct, unarmed robbery and breaking and entering in a May 17 attack on a woman in her home in the 15000 block of Tracey.
- * Two counts each of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and armed robbery and one count of breaking and entering for attacks Saturday on a mother and daughter in their home in the 19700 block of Westbrook.

Police said the 18-year-old daughter was sexually assaulted and robbed about 12:55 a.m. Saturday.

Entering through an unlocked kitchen window, the suspect armed himself with a kitchen knife and forced the daughter to cover her head with a pillow before he raped her, according to police reports. He then ransacked the bedroom, taking money and jewelry, before raping her again.

In 1974, Champion was the key witness against the Ernest Browning gang, which police believed committed at least seven torture-murders, 50 rapes and 250 armed robberies.

In exchange for a reduced sentence for assault, Champion testified against six other gang members, detailing how they had advanced from random robberies, sexual assaults and home invasions to murders and kidnappings.

In one case, gang members beat a 91-year-old man to death in a robbery. In another, the gang kidnapped and murdered two mid-level narcotics dealers. The gang tortured one of the dealers by burning his genitals.

Champion was released in early 1979, but arrested within two months. Charged with three counts of armed robbery and assault to commit criminal sexual conduct, he pleaded guilty to one count of armed robbery and was given a five- to 15-year sentence.

Records of the Michigan Department of Correction did not reflect the date or terms of Champion's release.

CUTLINE

Champion

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