



INSIDE THE COURTROOM WHERE TRUMP WAS FORCED TO LISTEN TO STORMY DANIELS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on May 8, 2024 by JENNIFER PELTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and JAKE OFFENHARTZ |

Associated Press



Donald Trump squirmed and scowled, shook his head and muttered as Stormy Daniels described the unexpected sex she says they had nearly two decades ago, saying she remembered "trying to think of anything other than what was happening."

It was a story Daniels has told before. This time, Trump had no choice but to sit and listen.

Years in the making, the in-person showdown between the former president and the porn actor who has become one of his nemeses happened Tuesday in a New York courtroom that has become the plainspoken stage for the historic spectacle of Trump's hush money trial, where the gravitas of the first-ever criminal trial of a former U.S. commander-in-chief butts up against a crass and splashy tale of sex, tabloids and payoffs.

It's often said that actual trials are not like the TV drama versions, and in that way, this one is no exception — a methodical and sometimes static proceeding of questions, answers and rules. But if Tuesday's testimony wasn't an electric scene of outbursts and tears, it was no less stunning for its sheer improbability.

Daniels' testimony had been speculated about for as long as Trump has been under indictment. But when it would happen was still a mystery until Tuesday morning, when her lawyer Clark Brewster confirmed in an email to an Associated Press reporter that it was "likely today."

But even after the trial resumed, Daniels still had to wait.

The first witness of the day was a publishing executive who read passages from some of Trump's business books.

Then, when the judge asked for the prosecution's next witness, Assistant District Attorney Susan Hoffinger matter-of-factly declared, "The people call Stormy Daniels."

Daniels strode briskly to the stand, not looking at Trump, her shoes clunking on the floor. The former president stared straight ahead until the moment she had passed his spot at the defense table, then tilted his head slightly in her direction.

As is standard in court proceedings, Daniels was asked if she saw Trump in the courtroom and to identify him. Before answering, Daniels, wearing eyeglasses, shuffled in her seat for a beat, looking around the courtroom. She then pointed toward him, describing his navy suit coat and gold tie, and said he was sitting at the defense table. Trump looked straight forward, lips pursed.

Dozens of reporters and a handful of public observers packed the courtroom gallery.

In one row alone: CNN anchor Erin Burnett, MSNBC host Lawrence O'Donnell and Andrew Giuliani, the son of Trump's former lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who wore a media credential from WABC Radio, where he and his dad host shows. Trump's son Eric sat elsewhere in the courtroom.

As she testified, Daniels spoke confidently and at a rapid clip, the sound of reporters typing reaching a frenetic tempo.

She spoke so quickly, at least six times during her testimony she was asked to slow down so a court stenographer could keep pace.

Jurors seemed as attentive as they've been all trial as Daniels recounted her path from aspiring veterinary student to porn actor.

One juror smiled when Daniels mentioned one of the ways into the industry was by winning a contest, like "Ms. Nude North America." Another juror's eyes widened as he read along on the monitor displaying a Truth Social post in which Trump said he "did NOTHING wrong" and used an insulting nickname to disparage Daniels' looks.

Trump denies her claims and has pleaded not guilty in the case, in which he's charged with falsifying business records related to a \$130,000 payment to Daniels to keep quiet.

Many of the jurors jotted notes throughout her testimony, peering up from notepads and alternating their gaze from Daniels in the witness box to the lawyers questioning her from a lectern.

Guided by prosecutors, Daniels drew a detailed scene of her alleged evening with Trump at a hotel suite in Lake Tahoe in 2006, delving frankly into details that Judge Juan M. Merchan would later concede "should probably have been left unsaid."

She recalled entering the sprawling suite to find Trump in a pair of silk pajamas. She sheepishly admitted to snooping through his bathroom toiletries in the bathroom, finding a pair of golden tweezers. Daniels even acted out part of her interaction with Trump, reclining back in the witness box to demonstrate how she said he was positioned on the bed of his hotel suite when she emerged from the restroom.

Her willingness to provide extra details prompted an unusual moment: Trump's lawyers consented to allowing a prosecutor to meet with Daniels in a side room, during a break in testimony, to give her some instructions to — as Judge Merchan put it — "make sure the witness stays focused on the question, gives the answer and does not give any unnecessary narrative."

Out of the earshot of the jury, or the reporters in the room, Merchan also asked Trump's lawyers to stop him from cursing as Daniels spoke.

"I understand that your client is upset at this point, but he is cursing audibly, and he is shaking his head visually and that's contemptuous. It has the potential to intimidate the witness and the jury can see that," the judge said. "I am speaking to you here at the bench because I don't want to embarrass him," Merchan added.

"I will talk to him," said one of Trump's lawyers, Todd Blanche.

Peppy and loquacious when she was being questioned by prosecutors, Daniels was feistier on cross-examination, digging in when defense lawyer Susan Necheles questioned her credibility and motives.

Daniels forcefully denied Necheles' suggestion that she had tried to extort Trump, answering the lawyer's contention: "False."

Daniels left the witness stand just before 4:30 p.m. She didn't look at Trump as she trod past. He didn't look at her, either, instead leaning over to whisper to Necheles.



Moments later, Merchan adjourned court until Thursday — with Wednesday the trial's usual off day. Trump left the courtroom with his entourage of lawyers and aides.

"This was a very revealing day in court. Any honest reporter would say that," Trump said to journalists in the hallway outside the courtroom. He is limited by court order from saying much more about Daniels to the media.

Inside the courtroom, the witnesses to history reconciled their thoughts, gathered their belongings and waited for Trump to leave the building, so they could, too.