

Thomas Convicted in Steroids Case

Contributed by PAUL ELIAS
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Tammy

Thomas is the latest athlete to be convicted in connection to the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative case. The former Olympic cyclist was found guilty of lying to a grand jury investigating a steroid distribution ring that has implicated some of sports' biggest stars.

Thomas, the first figure connected to the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative case to go to trial, shouted at the jury after being found guilty of three counts of perjury and a count of obstruction of justice. She was acquitted of two counts of perjury.

"I already had one career taken away from me," she yelled, referencing her lifetime ban from cycling. "Look me in the eye. You can't do it."

Her father, who has sat in the front row of court during the two week trial, also raised his voice and said, "They can't do it."

Thomas then shouted and gestured at prosecutors: "Look me in the eye You like to destroy people's lives."

Thomas, prosecutors and jurors all had no comment.

Outside the courthouse, Thomas' lawyer Ethan Balogh said he was disappointed.

"It is difficult for all of us who went through this trial," Balogh said.

Legal experts said Thomas faces a prison sentence of between six months and several years. She is scheduled to be sentenced July 18.

The federal government steroids probe has ensnared a number of elite athletes, including home run king Barry Bonds, track star Marion Jones and former San Francisco 49ers player Dana Stubblefield. Investigators are also looking into

whether pitcher Roger Clemens lied when he told Congress he never used performance-enhancing drugs.

Bonds is charged with perjury for allegedly lying to the same grand jury about never knowingly using performance-enhancing drugs.

Legal experts said Thomas' trial offered Bonds' lawyers a preview of what kind of evidence the slugger will face if his case goes to trial as expected. Two of Bonds' attorneys, for instance, watched the government's lead steroids investigator testify.

The investigator, IRS agent Jeff Novitzky, is expected to play a starring role for the government during Bonds' trial, which isn't expected to begin until next year.

Novitzky testified that Thomas' lies hindered the federal investigation of drug maker Patrick Arnold, who prosecutors wanted to indict in 2003 but had to wait another three years to amass more evidence because of the cyclist's perjured testimony.

The jury found Thomas guilty of falsely telling the grand jury that she had never taken steroids and had never received any performance-enhancing drugs from Arnold, who pleaded guilty in 2006 to making two undetectable steroids.

Thomas made her denials even though she was banned from cycling for life in August 2002 after the performance-enhancing drug Norbolethone was detected in her urine.

The drug, once an obscure steroid used in human tests in the 1960s, was rediscovered by Arnold, who supplied the Burlingame-based BALCO with undetectable performance-enhancing drugs.

Prosecutors also showed jurors Thomas medical records that showed she grew a full beard and underwent dramatic voice changes that a doctor diagnosed as side effects of heavy steroid use. Arnold also testified that he sent Thomas the steroids THG he invented at least once.

Thomas is the ninth BALCO figure to suffer convictions. Eight others, including Jones and BALCO founder Victor Conte, have pleaded guilty to various charges of perjury, drug and money laundering charges.

In addition, track coach Trevor Graham has pleaded not guilty to lying to federal agents about giving steroids to athletes. Graham's trial in San Francisco federal court is scheduled to begin May 19. Graham helped spur the

original BALCO investigation when he mailed a vial of Arnold's designer drug also called "the clear" to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

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