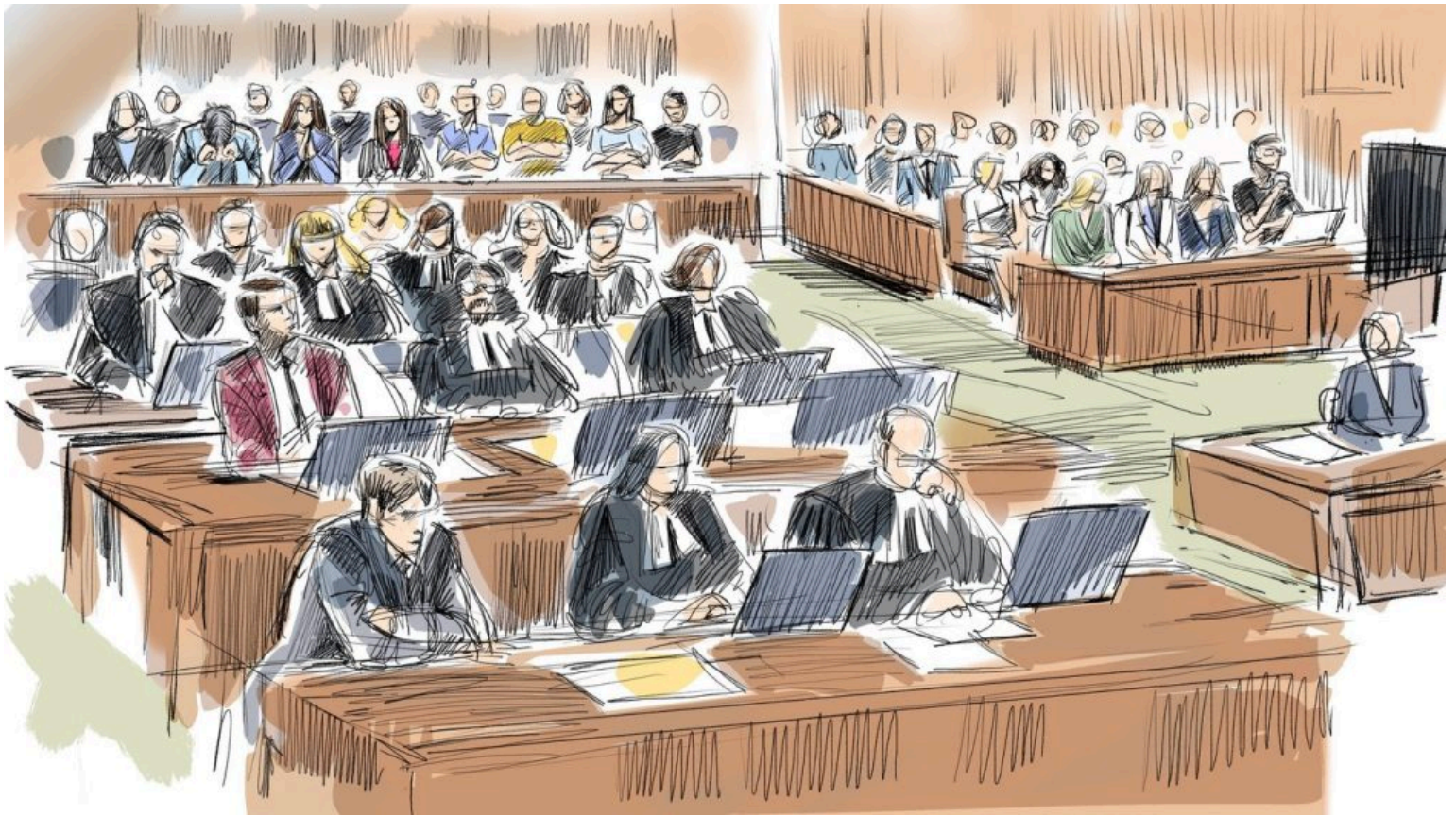


[WATCH LIVE](#)

'The case should have never been brought,' says Vancouver lawyer after Hockey Canada sex assault acquittals



The courtroom is shown in this sketch from London, Ont., as Justice Maria Carroccia delivers her ruling in the sexual assault trial for five former members of Canada's world junior hockey team, on Thursday, July 24, 2025. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Alexandra Newbould



By **Michael Williams**

Posted July 24, 2025 7:46 pm.

One of the most high-profile sexual assault trials in Canadian history — involving five former Hockey Canada players — has ended in five not-guilty verdicts.

And one veteran Vancouver-based defence lawyer believes Thursday's verdict raises serious concerns about how the case was handled from the start — and whether it was driven more by public pressure than by solid evidence.

"It's clear the judge did not believe the complainant," Michael Shapray told 1130 NewsRadio.

"It raises real questions as to why this prosecution was ever brought and the impact it's had on these players' careers and their lives."

The five players — Alex Formenton, Callan Foote, Carter Hart, Dillon Dube, and Michael McLeod — were cleared on all charges related to an alleged group sexual assault in a London, Ont., hotel room back in 2018.

Related: Five former members of Canada's world junior hockey team found not guilty of sexual assault

In a decision that lasted nearly four hours, Ontario Superior Court Justice Maria Carroccia ruled the complainant's story was inconsistent, exaggerated, and ultimately unreliable.

"It seems to me this case should have never been brought. And a real review of what happened here should take place," said Shapray.

The case had previously been investigated — both by the London Police Service and Hockey Canada — but no charges were initially laid. That changed after a civil settlement was revealed in 2022, triggering public outrage.

Shapray believes what followed was more about political correctness and headlines than due process.

While Thursday's verdict brings closure for the accused, Shapray says the damage is done — not just for the players, but also for public trust in the justice system.

"I think this falls squarely on the prosecution office in London, Ont. The London police didn't bring it forward at first, and under extraordinary public pressure, they resubmitted the case to the prosecution office. And in my opinion, it does not seem they had a viable case."

"They should have been able to assess the credibility and reliability of their own complainant in the case, and that's where the buck should have stopped."

Shapray adds that in many sexual assault cases, the fact that someone is charged becomes the headline, and if an eventual acquittal is ever reached, it's barely noticed.

However, in this case, he believes the strength of the judge's ruling — and the level of media coverage — might help repair some of the reputational damage.

Still, he expects the verdict will be heavily criticized, along with the judge who delivered it.

As for what happens next, the Crown has 30 days to appeal, but Shapray says he'd be shocked if they do.

'Horrible messaging' for victims, says advocate


Meanwhile, Angela Marie MacDougall, the executive director for Battered Women's Support Services, is concerned about how the verdict will set back the work being done to support victims of gender-based, sexualized, and domestic violence.

MacDougall says right out of the gate, the judge's first words that the complainant was not credible has led to "horrible messaging" in terms of what people are now saying about the case and the victim.

"It's quite frightening to see what the result of this case has done and what is going to happen over the next weeks, not only for this complainant but for all complainants and frankly for those of us that do this work," she said, pointing to the hostility they are now seeing.

"I'm concerned about how all of this is going to shake out knowing how much victims are already put under scrutiny. It's only gotten harder."

— *With files from Michelle Meiklejohn.*

 **Submit a Correction**

Accessibility Feedback

Top Stories