



"For Immediate Release"

Polk Sheriff's Office News Release

Sheriff Grady Judd

Media Contact: Donna C. Wood, PIO
863.534.6631 (office) or 863.287.9840 (mobile)

April 7, 2008

Teenager Beaten By Other Teens

"Shocking - I've never seen anything like it," said Sheriff Grady Judd as he described the video of a Felony Battery that occurred on March 30, 2008, at 6124 West Calendar Court, Lakeland, in which six female juveniles attacked a 16-year-old victim while one juvenile male and one adult male stood outside as "look-outs." "They lured her into the home for express purpose of filming the attack and posting it on the Internet. This is outrageous behavior."

The victim, a 16-year-old Lakeland resident, was staying at the home of one of her attackers, Mercedes Nichols, DOB 1/24/1991, during spring break. At approximately 8:00 pm, the victim arrived at the residence and was met by Nichols, and Brittini Hardcastle, DOB 9/10/1990, 1242 Thomasville Circle, Lakeland, who both began yelling at the victim and threatening her.

The victim went into a bedroom and was met by April Cooper, DOB 6/12/1993, 1111 West Greenwood Street, Lakeland, who began insulting and threatening her. Cooper, who had been hiding, then struck the victim several times in the face, and slammed the victim's head into the bedroom wall, knocking the victim unconscious as others were videotaping.

When the victim awoke, she was on the couch in the living room surrounded by Cooper, Nichols, Hardcastle, Cara Murphy, DOB, 01/02/1992, 2762 Highlands Creek Drive, Lakeland, Britney Mayes, DOB 01/20/1991, 1111 West Greenwood Street, Lakeland, and Kayla Hassell, DOB 10/13/1992, 4575 Old Colony Road, Mulberry.

The victim said it was at that time that all of the suspects began hitting and yelling at her while it was being video taped. At one point in the video, it is plain to see that the suspects blocked the victim from leaving the residence.

- MORE -

Teenager Beaten
Page Two PCSO Release

During the incident, two additional suspects, Zachary Ashley, DOB 3/11/1991, 6116 Calendar Court West, Lakeland, and Stephen Schumaker, DOB 10/20/1989, 6020 Calendar Court, Lakeland, acted as “look-outs” while the attack was occurring.

After the attack was over, three of the suspects forced the victim into a vehicle and drove her to another location where she was finally released with a threat from the suspects warning her not to contact law enforcement or she would be beaten even worse.

Once at a friend’s home, she called law enforcement and was transported to Lakeland Regional Medical Center by ambulance for injuries sustained as a result of the beating.

On the video, the teenage victim can be seen being beaten while the suspects video taped the crime, laughed, and encouraged one another to hurt the victim. All of the juvenile suspects were transported to the Juvenile Assessment Center without further incident. The single adult, Schumaker was taken to the Polk County Jail. All suspects were charged with **Felony Battery and False Imprisonment**.

Mayes, Hardcastle, and Nichols are the three juvenile suspects who forced the victim into the vehicle and drove the victim to another location. They are charged additionally with **Felony Kidnapping**.

