

STILL A DOGFIGHT, BUT NOW ITS IN COURT

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The question is, who bit whom first?

The owner of a pit bull that mauled a Siberian husky and its owner went on trial yesterday in First District Court in Central Islip, with lawyers arguing about whether Mary Graham of Huntington Station can be held criminally responsible for her pet.

Michael Brown of Central Islip, Graham's attorney, said Richard Robbins of Melville was in harm's way only because he dived into the fight between his dog, Gina Marie, and Graham's pit bull, Dutch, and then bit Dutch.

"Mr. Robbins on his own decided to take his own body and bite one of the dogs," Brown said in his opening statement. Judge John Toomey Jr. will determine the outcome of the trial.

Both Graham and Robbins had been walking their dogs at Birchwood Elementary School on July 13 when the dogs began fighting. Graham, 50, is charged with reckless endangerment and third-degree assault, both misdemeanors. If convicted, she faces up to a year in jail.

Robbins, 45, is scheduled to testify later this week. In an interview yesterday, he said nerves in his eye and hand are still damaged from the attack. "I wouldn't allow a loved one of mine to get mauled," he said. "The nightmares have not gone away."

Yesterday, the first witness to testify, David Meitz of Huntington Station, said he was playing basketball with his son at the school that day.

Meitz said Robbins had walked by with his three dogs, and at least one or two of them were not leashed. The dogs stayed close to Robbins, Meitz said. Later, he saw Graham walking across the athletic field with her three dogs, in the same direction Robbins had gone, and Meitz said he saw her take the leash off a large brown pit bull.

Then he heard Robbins yelling and saw him running toward two dogs that were tumbling on the ground together. "He dove into the middle of the dogs, a Pete Rose dive," Meitz testified. In the melee, one of Graham's other dogs, Eve, bit Robbins in the eye. He began yelling for help, and

Meitz said he sprinted toward him. "I honestly thought his eye was out," Meitz said, adding that Robbins' face was covered in blood.

Eventually, he said, he took Dutch's chain from Graham and throttled the dog, forcing him to release his grip and then lying on top of the animal until police arrived.

"Did you see Robbins with skin in his mouth? With hair, with fur in his mouth?" Brown asked.

"No," Meitz said.