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Swim coach charged

EXCLUSIVE
Paula Doneman and Wayne Smith

SCOTT Volkert, coach of Australian Olympic and world champions including Sam Riley and Susie O'Neill, will face a Brisbane court next week charged with offences dating to the 1980s.

Volkert, 42, a married father of two daughters, was arrested at his Bracken Ridge home on Brisbane's northside last night.

Detectives took him to police headquarters in Roma St and charged him with five offences involving two teenage swimming pupils he had allegedly coached.

The charges related to incidents in 1985 and 1987.

Volkert's solicitor, Peter Shields, last night told *The Courier-Mail* his client maintained his innocence and would vigorously defend the charges.

"My client has co-operated fully with the police but denied any knowledge of the offences and he will be defending the charges most vigorously," Mr Shields said.

"These charges have come like a bolt out of the blue.

"As all people do, people in high-profile public positions deserve the presumption of innocence.

"I guess we can thank Senator (Bill) Heffernan for the perfect example he has given of that in relation to his attack on His Honour, Justice Kirby.

"There is a due process.

Mr Shields said his client had an untarnished reputation.

Volkert declined to comment.

Police had launched an investigation late last year.

Volkert is head coach of the Queensland Academy of Sport's swimming program.

Australia's swimming fraternity was shocked by the charges.

Dual Olympic gold medalist O'Neill, when told of the charges, said: "You're kidding."

"It's a complete surprise to me. I'm completely staggered by this. Ms O'Neill said swimming coaches were particularly vulnerable to accusations.

Former national head coach Don Talbot said there was not a swim coach in the world who did not feel extremely vulnerable.

Talbot said he was utterly stunned by the allegations against Volkert.

Asked if he considered Volkert to have been a protégé, Talbot replied: "In a way he was."

"He did a great job coaching here for Australia and always conducted himself with decorum in team situations.

Australian Swimming Inc president John Devitt confirmed Volkert had been shortlisted for the post of national coach.

Dual world breaststroke champion Riley said she was shocked by the news.

Ms Riley, who trained with Volkert from the age of 15, said she had the highest respect for him.

Volkert will appear in the Magistrate's Court on April 8.

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