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Stern Judge Fujisaki Is Shaping Simpson Trial

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Fujisaki's friends say the more relaxed approach reflects his personality. As he has gained confidence in his ability to handle a daunting assignment like the Simpson trial, Fujisaki has let his natural sense of humor creep back into his work. "Off the bench," said Superior Court Judge Paul Boland, "he is a low-key, relaxed individual who does not take himself too seriously."

He does, however, take his job seriously.

Though he starts nearly every court session late, Fujisaki places a premium on efficiency. He demands that most briefs be less than five pages long, and he refuses to burn up court time on repetitive speeches. When Simpson attorney Robert Blaiser rose to ask the judge if he wanted to hear oral arguments on pretrial motions, for example, Fujisaki snapped: "I've read them, I've considered them, and I'm ready to rule. But if you feel insecure about something. . . ."

Later, Blaiser dared to challenge a ruling on the validity of blood tests. Fujisaki once again shut him up with a crisp retort. "You already had your turn to comment," the judge said. "Now it's my turn to comment, and I'm commenting."

Fujisaki's refusal to reconsider his rulings--or even listen to lawyers' protests--means that "sometimes you may not get as much justice as you think you deserve, because he's no-nonsense and makes up his mind fairly quickly," said John K. Pierson, a Brentwood business litigator who has appeared before the judge.

Still, Pierson and others call Fujisaki extremely fair, and praise him for conducting his own research rather than relying on clerks.

Indeed, several times in the civil trial, Fujisaki has pulled out law books on the bench to read passages that prove his point. "His rulings are well reasoned," said lawyer Robert J. Stoll, who specializes in personal-injury and wrongful-death cases. "You can't put one over on him."

Fujisaki still has some important rulings ahead of him in the Simpson case.

He has yet to decide how much leeway the defense will have in referring to former LAPD Det. Mark Fuhrman, who recently pleaded no contest to a felony perjury charge stemming from his testimony in the Simpson criminal trial.

He also must rule on the plaintiffs' request to tell jurors that an unconfirmed chemical test indicated the possible presence of blood in Simpson's bathroom and on an air conditioner jutting into the alley where Fuhrman said he found a bloody glove. Finally, Fujisaki must decide whether the plaintiffs can put so-called profile experts on the stand to testify about how the murders may have fit into a pattern of spousal abuse.

But perhaps his biggest challenge will be keeping everyone in line as the trial progresses.

He's already had to deal with one outburst--when plaintiff Fred Goldman held a news conference on the courthouse lawn to rebut criticism of his fund-raising drive.

The judge's response to that incident was vintage Fujisaki. "I want you to understand, I'm not just moving my mouth just to move my mouth," he said, addressing Goldman's attorney in particular but making sure that every lawyer in the courtroom heard his message.

"I've put a considerable amount of effort into this case," he told them. "I don't want to see it go down the drain because the parties can't control themselves."