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Jury: Terelle Donaldson Not Guilty

By Jeff Scullin
The Ledger
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CORRECTION: The following correction was published June 26, 2003. The changes have not been incorporated into the article below:

A story on page B1 on Saturday incorrectly said that prosecutors had presented several pieces of evidence during Terelle Donaldson's first-degree murder trial that were not introduced to the jury but were used during a co-defendant's trial:

Investigators found traces of gunshot residue on Donaldson's hands, but prosecutors did not use the information in Donaldson's trial because it was inconclusive.

Prosecutors also were unable to introduce a letter sent to Eddie McIntosh, an eyewitness who testified at both trials, threatening to physically harm McIntosh unless he changed his testimony, because the letter could not be positively linked to Donaldson.

BARTOW -- Prosecutors presented what they considered ample evidence to convict Terelle Donaldson of Charles Arnold's murder three years ago: traces of gunshot residue on his hands, testimony from two eyewitnesses and a jailhouse snitch and fingerprints tying him to the killing.

In the end, however, jurors found Donaldson, 20, not guilty Friday on charges of first-degree murder and attempted carjacking after deliberating for slightly more than three hours.

For Arnold's parents, who waited out the hours -- hoping to see the man they hold responsible for their son's death convicted -- the verdict left an empty feeling.

"We hoped it would be the end, but it's not," Arnold's father, Renard Bowman, said shortly after Senior Judge Dan Strickland read the jury's verdict. "It doesn't bring closure."

Both parents said they expected a guilty verdict for what Barbara Bowman, Arnold's mother, called the murder of "an innocent bystander."

But Donaldson's attorneys said that prosecutors had charged an innocent man in Arnold's death and argued that Donaldson was being framed because of a grudge the victim's friends held against him.

"If all witnesses told the truth, Terelle Donaldson wouldn't be here," Assistant Public Defender Josh Schoen told jurors during closing arguments Friday.



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Schoen attacked the credibility of Steven Samarripas and Eddie McIntosh, who were with Arnold the night he died and identified Donaldson and Jason Moore, 20, as the men who tried to carjack them and shot Arnold.

"They were untruthful, right from the get-go," Schoen said. "If you can't believe what they say, there's no evidence of what happened . . . (and) they would lie about anything."

According to investigators, Arnold, Samarripas and McIntosh were talking in the parking lot of an apartment complex at 455 Ave. T N.E. shortly after midnight on Nov. 15, 2001, when Moore and Donaldson confronted them at gunpoint.

The three men did not resist when their assailants demanded the keys to Samarripas' customized 1987 Cutlass Supreme, which had been stolen the month before.

But after Moore announced that he couldn't get the car to start, Donaldson saw McIntosh, Samarripas and Arnold trying to run away, and he shot Arnold in the back of the head, according to investigators. They said they found Donaldson's fingerprints in Samarripas' car and traces of gunshot residue on his hands.

Investigators recovered the gun used to shoot Arnold based on information from a jailhouse informant, who said that Donaldson told him where he hid the gun after they met in the Polk County Jail.

They also found Donaldson's fingerprints on a letter and prepared affidavit sent to McIntosh in jail, asking him to say that he could not identify the two assailants who killed Arnold and tried to steal Samarripas' car.

Donaldson's lawyers argued that McIntosh and Samarripas told police that Moore and Donaldson were the assailants because they thought that Moore and Donaldson's brother, Dwayne, had stolen Samarripas' car the month before and wanted to get even.

But Assistant State Attorney Cass Castillo told jurors Friday that Samarripas and McIntosh knew the assailants from their neighborhood and rejected the theory the witnesses had lied to police.

"This is not a situation where it's stranger to stranger," Castillo said. "They knew precisely who did this.

"They want the person to pay who did this to their friend and tried to steal their car," Castillo continued.

Earlier this month, a jury convicted Moore of first-degree murder and attempted carjacking -- the same charges Donaldson faced. Moore is scheduled to be sentenced June 25.

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