

LOCAL

Jury convicts teen

Found guilty of involuntary manslaughter, not murder, in death of Fairfield teenager

By JESSICA BROWN
BUTLER COUNTY BUREAU

HAMILTON — A Butler County jury Thursday night acquitted a Springfield Township teenager of murder, instead convicting him of involuntary manslaughter for the death of a Fairfield teen.

The involuntary manslaughter conviction of Adrian Reynolds, 17, is punishable by one to five years in prison.

Murder would have been punishable by a mandatory 15 years to life in prison for

Reynolds, who was tried as an adult.

Reynolds' sentencing for the August 2004 beating death of 17-year-old Brandon Mitchell is set April 25.

An initial misunderstanding of the verdict Thursday night caused Reynolds' mother to run screaming from the courtroom as soon as she heard the judge say "guilty."

Reynolds began sobbing and said "Oh my God," shaking his head.

"I'm not finished," said Butler

County Common Pleas Court Judge Patricia Oney over the outbursts from Reynolds and his family, who were then cleared from the courtroom. "Guilty of involuntary manslaughter."

Reynolds closed his eyes, as he realized he'd been acquitted of murder.

"Thank you, thank you" he said, turning to the jury as Mitchell's mother began sobbing uncontrollably into the arms of friends and relatives.

Two of the jurors were wiping their eyes by the time the group returned to the jury room.

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The three-man, nine-woman jury had deliberated for about seven hours. Oney had allowed them to consider both murder and the lesser included offense of involuntary manslaughter.

The murder charge specified Reynolds killed Mitchell while committing felonious assault. Involuntary manslaughter specified the death occurred during misdemeanor assault.

Reynolds' attorney, Clyde Bennett had unsuccessfully sought to allow jurors to also consider a self-defense claim. Yet he was pleased with the jury's verdict.

"This is a major victory," Bennett said after the hearing. "I have more faith in the jury system than I ever have."

"We're happy the truth came out," said Reynolds' mother, Leethel Hamon-Reynolds. "It was a fight between two kids. I'm sorry she lost her child and my condolences go out to the family. I thank God the jury told the truth with their verdict."

A grief-stricken Kim Mitchell, the victim's mother, was still sobbing as she left the courtroom with her teary-eyed children, family and friends after the verdict.

"They (messed) up bad," she said. "He killed my son. Now he's going to be able to kill someone else."

Authorities said Reynolds, of Meredith Drive, beat Mitchell to death during an Aug. 13, 2004, fight behind the Fairfield Point apartment complex at 129 Danube Drive in Fairfield.

Reynolds did not testify. According to police, he admitted he hit Mitchell two to three times, but his attorney said Reynolds' actions did not constitute murder.

During closing arguments Thursday afternoon, Bennett said Reynolds — who was 16 at the time of the incident — did not foresee the consequences of his actions when he engaged in a mutual fight with Mitchell that day.

"This case is not about murder," Bennett said. "It's about two young men squaring off. It's about age and immaturity. What would you have done if you were a 16-year-old young man?"

"This was a fist fight that went bad. This was a fist fight with unforeseeable consequences," Bennett said.

He referred to the coroner's testimony, stating most fist fights do not result in the unique injury that killed Mitchell — a rupture of the vertebral artery. The coroner testified laypersons would not have known that artery was so vulnerable.

"If you apply the prosecution's logic," Bennett said, "every time teenagers get into a fight, someone would die. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the time that does not occur. Death was not a logical foreseeable result."

Prosecutor Robin Piper told jurors in his closing argument that Reynolds had fled the scene and initially lied to police about his involvement.

Piper highlighted testimony from several witnesses who said they saw Reynolds continue to kick or hit Mitchell several times as he lay motionless on the ground.

"He was kicked in the neck ... and hit in the back of the head after he is on the ground. These injuries cannot possibly be just mere assault," Piper said.

He referred jurors to the graphic autopsy photos of Mitchell's face, bruised and swollen to the point of being "unrecognizable," Piper said.

He said the injuries indicate felonious assault — not just assault — and therefore urged jurors to convict Reynolds of murder.