

Deputies not guilty in case of injured teen

Judge says inmate's rights not violated

With joyful family members surrounding him, Lucas County Sheriff's Deputy Troy Jackson said last night he was just doing his job the day he encountered a combative youth in the county's Juvenile Detention Center — a situation that landed him in the federal court system, facing charges of civil rights violations.

Deputy Jackson and his colleague, Deputy Marc Odoms, were found not guilty last night of obstructing justice and violating the civil rights of a 15-year-old boy in their custody.

Deputy Jackson was exonerated of charges that he punched the teenager in the face and then lied about it.

Deputy Odoms was found not guilty of failing to intervene in the alleged beating and accusations that he lied on both departmental reports about the Jan. 20, 2005, incident and to the FBI agent who was investigating.

"I was doing my job," a visibly relieved Deputy Jackson said after the verdict. "That's all that I did, my job."

Cincinnati-based attorney Clyde Bennett, who represented Deputy Odoms, said that his client was elated by the verdict.

Deputy Odoms, who declined to comment, was surrounded by his family, who thanked both jurors and God for the deputy's acquittal.

"He told me that he can now sleep," Mr. Bennett said. "He can resume his normal life."

Although in the courtroom during closing arguments, the teenager and his parents were

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not present for the verdict. When contacted through their attorney, they declined comment.

The verdict came after four days of testimony in U.S. District Court in Toledo. A jury of 10 women and 2 men deliberated for nearly seven hours yesterday before returning not-guilty verdicts on the three counts each of the deputies faced.

Prosecutors from the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division declined comment yesterday, referring all questions to the division's public relations department.

During the trial, with Judge Jack Zouhary presiding, federal prosecutors alleged that Deputy Jackson punched a handcuffed teenager in his face while Deputy Odoms watched, failing to intervene.

Defense attorneys countered that the teenager assaulted Deputy Jackson with a head-butt, a likely cause of his injuries, and continued to be combative until he was eventually subdued.

"He didn't do it, they didn't do it," said Deputy Jackson's attorney, Dominic Vitantonio, of Cleveland. "The whole incident was blown way out of proportion."

During closing arguments, prosecutors painted a picture of a vengeful deputy who was angered by an unruly youth.

Jacob Sanford, now 18, testified during the trial about what happened to him the day he was brought into the detention center after being handcuffed during a juvenile hearing.

He said that he was knocked to the floor, dragged into a holding cell, and punched in the face, all while being handcuffed.

Photos of the teenager's face at the time showed what prosecutors called "severe injuries," including swelling, bruises, and a black eye.

Testifying on behalf of the government during the trial were several civilian staff members of the Juvenile Justice Center, medical doctors, and Lucas County sheriff's deputies who were staffing the intake area at the time of the incident.

The deputies already had been cleared of wrongdoing in a departmental review and have maintained their jobs at the sheriff's department.

Throughout the trial, and during Deputy Odoms' testimony, the pair maintained that the teenager had been the aggressor and that Deputy Jackson had only used an appropriate amount of force to subdue the teenager.

— *Brica Blake*