

Williams could still face retrial, time in prison

SOMERVILLE, N.J. (AP) - Although acquitted of the most serious charge, retired NBA star Jayson Williams faces the possibility of a retrial, as well as prison time for convictions on attempting to conceal the shooting of a hired driver.

Williams, 36, was convicted Friday on four of six lesser charges, related to tampering with evidence and trying to cover up the death of Costas "Gus" Christofi, 55. He was killed by a shotgun blast as Williams handled the weapon while showing friends his mansion.

After four days of deliberations, the jury cleared Williams of aggravated manslaughter but could not reach an unanimous verdict on the second major charge, reckless manslaughter, which carries up to 10 years in prison.

Several jurors said they were split 8-4 on that count, with the majority voting not guilty. Prosecutors have not yet decided whether to retry Williams.

The jurors said they accepted the defense argument that the shooting was an accident and the weapon misfired.

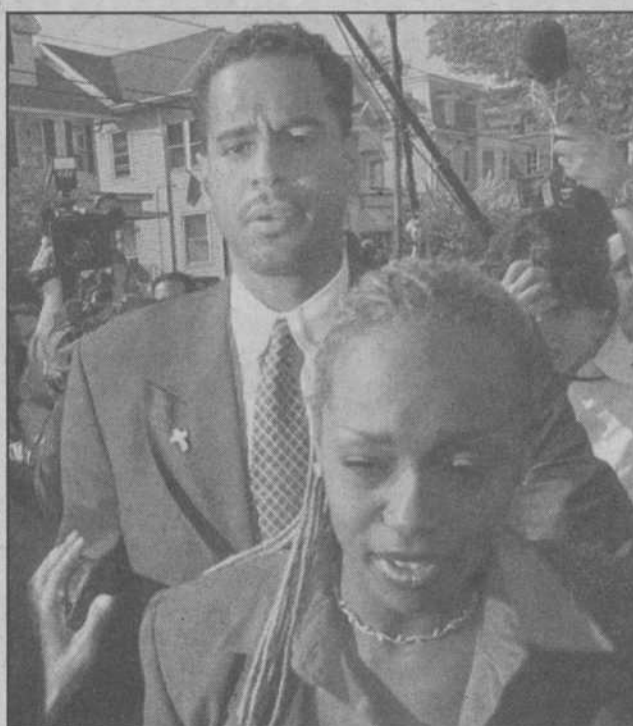
"Jayson Williams is not a criminal," said juror Ann Stengel.

"Was he negligent? Yes. Should he have known better? Yes."

"I never looked over there and saw a cold-blooded killer," juror Angela Pravata said.

However, they did convict Williams of four charges, include witness and evidence tampering.

Together, the four charges



Former NBA star Jayson Williams and his wife, Tanya, leave the Somerset County Courthouse in Somerville, N.J., following the verdicts in his manslaughter trial, Friday.

read.

After he sat down, he leaned back and kissed his wife, Tanya, who was seated behind him. He remains free on bail.

He did not speak to reporters as he left the courtroom, holding hands with his wife.

Defense lawyer Billy Martin said the verdict showed the jury understood the investigation was flawed.

"We told the jury there had never been an objective investigation. We told the jury this was an accident," Martin said.

The victim's nephew, Anthony Christofi, told Court TV he was disappointed by the split verdict, "but we have to respect the decision the jury made."

Another Christofi relative, nephew Chris Adams, reacted bitterly.

"He was never held accountable for his actions. He was reckless; he was showing off," Adams said. "He thinks he's a mobster. All this fame and power went to his head."

The shooting took place as Williams was giving friends and members of the

Harlem Globetrotters a tour of his estate in western New Jersey in the early hours of Feb. 14, 2002.

Testimony showed Williams took a loaded shotgun from a cabinet, cracked it open, turned, uttered an obscenity at Christofi and snapped it closed. It then fired once, sending 12 pellets into Christofi's chest. He died within minutes.

Five witnesses testified Williams then wiped down the shotgun, and four said Williams placed it in the victim's hands.

Besides claiming it was an accident, the defense asserted that the former NBA All-Star was so distraught after the shooting he could not organize a cover-up.

The verdict came after jurors informed the judge they could not reach a decision on one count.

On Thursday, jurors told Judge Edward M. Coleman they had reached a decision on six of the charges, but could not agree on two others.

The eight women and four men sat since Feb. 10 and deliberated for nearly 23 hours.

NAACP executive: Class-based programs lacking

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - As class divisions deepen in America, they must be addressed to assure equal educational opportunities, but not at the expense of race-conscious programs that have already proved their effectiveness, says Ted Shaw, the new president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

"Race and class have always been intertwined, inextricably intertwined. They will continue to be. But, race is not class," Shaw says. "I think we ought to recognize that we have a growing depth along class lines and we have to address it...But, one of the unfortunate things in the affirmative action struggles was that time and again some working class White Americans buy the story that the lack of opportunity that their children experienced in higher education at elite institutions was because of affirmative action. Well, there aren't enough African-American, minority, and Latino students to account for all of the White working class parents and children who see that they're not getting all the opportunities that they ought to have."

Even after Grutter v. Bollinger, the University of Michigan Law School case that the U.S. Supreme Court says can permit the use of race as a factor in college admissions, affirmative action will continue to be under attack, Shaw says.

"Those who are attacking affirmative action are not going away. And they have in their crosshairs all programs that are targeted at minorities, particularly at African-Americans. In the aftermath of Michigan, there's another storm brewing. We don't know exactly where it's going to strike, but we're preparing for it. It would be unwise to talk about all the things we're doing," Shaw says. "We're going to fight on every front."

Shaw, who this week succeeds Elaine Jones as LDF head, was speaking as part of the National Press Club's Newsmaker Lun-

cheon series.

On May 17th, the nation will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark 1954 decision outlawing separate but equal schools.

"Brown's 50th anniversary should not be an occasion for blind rejoicing, but rather an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the ideals that Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall, Connie Motley, Jack Greenburg, Bob Carter, and others worked for so long ago and continued to work for all their lives," he says, referring to civil rights lawyers who helped eliminate legal or de jure segregation.

In a question-and-answer segment, Shaw said LDF, the lead litigator in the Brown case, will continue fighting mandatory minimum sentences, racial profiling, racial disparities in drug sentencing, racial disparities in health care and oppose doctrinaire federal judges.

He said LDF will be particularly active monitoring the November presidential election.

"We're not going to give electronic voting methods a pass. We're going to be watching them just as we will hanging chads," Shaw says. "... Every citizen of voting age should have the right to cast a ballot regardless of who they are, what party they're affiliated with or where they come from."

In the 2000 election in Florida, 200,000 votes were not counted in Florida and another 4 to 6 million votes nationwide.

Jones retired after more than 30 years with the LDF. On average, she was flying 150,000 miles per year.

"The Brown verses Board of Education is really a capstone case in terms of how our nation has progressed through law. It is the case that ushered in the end of apartheid, American style," she says. "And Brown enabled communities and people to understand that we have a right to be arguable, and we have a right to push for that

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carry up to 13 years in prison. But Williams would probably receive a sentence of less than five years, the maximum for the most serious count. No date was set for sentencing. Williams could have faced up to 55 years in prison if convicted on all eight counts.

Williams displayed no emotion as he stood with his lawyers as the verdicts were

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