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Not guilty verdict in murder trial

By Jerry Urban
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GALVESTON - A Galveston jury Thursday found a 26-year old Alcoa man not guilty of murder in the shooting of a friend in La Marque.

A jury of 11 women and one man deliberated for about four hours to find Larry Seeton innocent in the killing of Jared Sanford, 19, of La Marque.

Seeton was accused of shooting Sanford about 11 p.m. Sept. 12, 2001, "in cold blood" outside a La Marque residence in the 700 block of Shady Lane.

Seeton, testifying on his own behalf in the 212th Judicial District Court, said he shot Sanford in self-defense.

Taylor Schwab, an assistant district attorney prosecuting the case, said he respected the jury's decision, but disagreed with its conclusion. Schwab also said Sanford's family and friends were "devastated" by the verdict.

Evidence in the trial showed that the shooting evolved after Seeton stole a computer from Sanford's brother.

Sanford, according to witnesses, slapped Seeton twice on the side of the head during an altercation outside the residence, where another friend lived. Three men at the residence testified that they saw Seeton fire the 9mm pistol. The men also testified that Sanford was backing away from Seeton with his hands in the air before being shot.

Seeton said he fired one warning shot at Sanford's feet, but, fearing for his safety; then fired again.

"I really did think he (Sanford) had something on him," testified Seeton, adding it appeared that Sanford was reaching for a weapon in his pants. Sanford wasn't armed.

One of the bullets went through Sanford's shoulder and into his chest.

In his final argument Schwab said Seeton "in a fit of rage and in cold blood shot a defenseless Jared and killed him."

Schwab reminded the jury that Sanford backed off and then began to turn away when Seeton raised the gun at him. Schwab also said there was no reason to believe that Seeton feared for his life. If he actually feared for his life, that would be a legal defense in court.

The prosecutor, suggesting Seeton was not truthful, also emphasized to the jury that Seeton's testimony contradicted what he told police shortly after the shooting.

"(Seeton) has been made to look like a punk and he's going after Jared/, Schwab said.

Tad Nelson, a Galveston attorney representing Seeton, declined to comment about the case.

However, during Nelson's final argument to jurors he said the testimony of the three eyewitnesses contradicted what they told police.

"Everybody will see things from their own perception," said Nelson. "It's all about perception."

Nelson emphasized that Seeton fired off a warning shot, an indication that he didn't want to kill his friend.

"The jury has to ask what they would do in his shoes," said Nelson " ... Jared put himself in a bad situation. ... He (Seeton) thought he was friends with Jared, too, but he popped him in the face twice."

Nelson added that Sanford's last words before being shot were directed at his brother, who also was at the location. Those words were: "Buddy get him (Seeton)."

Not admitted into evidence in the trial was that Seeton didn't have a permit for the gun and was in illegal possession of it.