

Jury recommends life for murderer

Convict in rape, killing of loan officer in 2004 avoids death penalty

By Tonya Alanez | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
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Adam Meretsky, 23, who was convicted of raping and killing a Wachovia Bank loan officer while burglarizing her home in 2004, will be sentenced on Jan. 23. On the right is his defense Attorney Hilliard Moldof. (Carline Jean, SunSentinel / January 12, 2009)

When the bank loan officer arrived to find the crack-addicted youth burglarizing her Imperial Point home, he strangled and raped her.

On Monday, jurors decided Adam Blake Meretsky, now 23, should spend his life in prison without the possibility of parole, rather than die, for the October 2004 slaying of Candace Jarrell, 40.

It took the jury 15 minutes to make its choice.

Broward Circuit Judge John Murphy is not bound by the jury's decision, but judges rarely go against such recommendations. Sentencing is set for Jan. 23.

Jarrell was an "irreplaceable, brilliant light" who worked at Wachovia Bank and often befriended her customers, indulged in holiday baking binges and blared Frank Sinatra tunes while cleaning her home, her sister Mary Catherine Fawcett told the jurors.

"She filled the room with her laughter, light and caring," said Fawcett, 55, of Pompano Beach, brushing at tears.

Prosecutor Peter Holden had told the four-man, eight-woman jury that Meretsky should die for senselessly propelling a drug-driven burglary into rape and death.

"He rendered the victim unconscious," Holden said. "She was no threat to him, yet he still decided to rape her."

In his plea for mercy, defense attorney Chris Pole portrayed Meretsky as a 19-year-old kid debilitated by mental disorders and consumed by addiction.

He burglarized to feed his habit, Pole said, and hid scared in a spare room when Jarrell came home.

"We leave the death penalty to the most heinous of crimes," Pole said. "The worst of the worst. If this is the case for death, what is reserved for the serial killer?"

Meretsky's mother, Mona, tearfully told how her son suffered through his parents' divorce at age 6, turned to drugs in middle school and was shuffled from public to private to military schools to an Idaho wilderness camp to a psychiatric facility.

Just days before Jarrell's killing, she said, her son called her in a suicidal state and said: "I'm out of control, Mom. I need help."

Following advice not to enable her troubled son, she said, she told him he could not stay with her.

When jurors signaled their decision Monday, Meretsky's father, Warren, stood in the hallway, face in hands. He did not enter the courtroom to hear the verdict.

Upon hearing the call for life in prison, Mona Meretsky softly murmured a few words, a shawl wrapped around her slumped shoulders.