

Judge calls for a competency exam before King's sentencing

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Michael King

SARASOTA - The sentencing phase for convicted killer Michael King was delayed today after lunch when Judge Deno Economou announced the court needs to double-check King's mental state.

Last week a jury found King guilty in the January 2008 kidnapping, rape and murder of Denise Lee. The prosecution wants they jury to vote to put King to death for the crimes.

This morning the defense put King's oldest brother, his sister-in-law and his ex-girlfriend on the stand. All testified a severe depression had taken over King in the months before the murder.

King's sister-in-law, Carrie King, pointed to the downturn in the economy, which made it difficult for King to find a job and left him battling foreclosure.

The defense has also argued a sledding accident as a child has diminished King's mental faculties and his ability to grasp societal rules. Today's witnesses testified the accident may have also caused King to suffer severe nosebleeds as a child and endure ringing in his ears as an adult.

Experts have ruled King competent to stand trial.

But this afternoon when the prosecution argued for calling the lead detective to the stand in order to illustrate how King behaved in the hours after the murder as opposed to the "catatonic state" he has displayed during the course of his more than two-week trial, it triggered a response from the court.

Assistant State Attorney Lon Arend said he wants to bring in law enforcement who arrested King on Jan. 17, 2008, to say he was not acting in a catatonic state.

The judge told the attorneys that Arend bringing up the catatonic state means he now has a question about King's competency, and must be sure King is mentally fit to proceed with his sentencing.

The jury has seen King with a vapid stare and remain emotionless throughout the trial. Arend said he does not want the jury to get the impression that is how King always acts or how he was acting the night of the murder.

Judge Economou said the law required him to stop the proceedings. Experts from both sides plan to review King this afternoon.

Economou did not tell jurors the source of the delay before sending them home early. The court must reach a decision on King's competency before the trial resumes at 10 a.m. Thursday.

Information from the Sarasota Herald-Tribune was used in this report.