

Cop cleared of rape charge

Worcester jury acquits Fairfax sheriff's deputy of rape, assault

BY BRIAN SHANE • STAFF WRITER • JULY 25, 2008

SNOW HILL -- A Worcester County Circuit Court jury acquitted a Fairfax County Sheriff's Deputy of charges of second-degree rape and assault stemming from a February incident at the Princess Bayside Hotel.

The palpably emotional case revolved around the credibility of the alleged rape victim, characterized by both prosecution and defense attorneys as having a drinking problem, and her statements to police where that she could not recall if she had consented to the sex. Jurors took about 90 minutes to reach their verdict late Thursday at the end of the two-day trial.

Zachary Dennis Taylor, 32, met his 23-year-old accuser Feb. 23 during a bachelor party weekend in Ocean City with six of his fellow deputies. The woman told police that Taylor, who is married, allegedly undressed and raped her early the next morning in on the bathroom floor of his hotel room. Both had been drinking, and the woman was described in court as having been severely intoxicated.

Worcester County State's Attorney Joel Todd, representing the woman, estimated that her blood-alcohol concentration at the time of the incident was .24, more than three times the legal limit for drivers in Maryland. Four hours later, her BAC was recorded at .14 by medical personnel, Todd said in court.

"The jury was not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that the woman was mentally incapacitated (by alcohol)," Todd said after the verdict. "If I had to try the case again, there isn't anything I would have done differently. I thought we met our burden of proof." Her family was "disappointed" with the verdict, he added.

According to court testimony, Taylor at first denied to police that he had sex with the woman. Later, he admitted their intercourse was consensual after detectives presented him with her statement.

Security footage played in court Thursday showed Taylor leaving Seacrets nightclub around 1 a.m. with his accuser, who was so intoxicated that Taylor was seen holding her upright as they walked. They stopped at a bench to evaluate where to go next, and the woman said she would return to his hotel room, according to court testimony.

Taylor's friends testified that they and two of the accuser's female friends left Seacrets around 2 a.m. When they arrived at the hotel, the group was met by Ocean City police after a hotel employee called 911 after finding the alleged rape victim crying on a couch in the lobby, police said.

Taylor turned himself into Anne Arundel County Police a few days after the alleged incident. A five-year correctional officer with the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office, Taylor was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the case, agency spokesman Lt. Sonny Cachuela said in February.

Thomas Pavlinic, Taylor's attorney, presented photographs taken three weeks after the alleged incident as evidence. Found on the woman's MySpace profile page, the pictures showed her out drinking with friends for St. Patrick's Day.

Pavlinic said if the woman were truly traumatized, "she would be home, re-evaluating her life and the circumstances that brought her to that point."

He said the jury was swayed by the woman's testimony that people who have been drinking should accept responsibility for their actions.

"The case really could have gone either way," Pavlinic said. "Zach's a decent man, and he made a mistake, so we're grateful."

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