

Aaron Hernandez found guilty of first-degree murder

Boston Herald

FALL RIVER — Aaron Hernandez — once considered one of the brightest stars of the New England Patriots — is a cold-blooded murderer who should spend the rest of his life behind bars, a jury found today.

Twelve jurors, who deliberated for seven days, unanimously found that Hernandez killed his friend Odin Lloyd during the early morning hours of June 17, 2013. The Dorchester 27-year-old was riddled with six bullet holes, his body left in a North Attleboro industrial park less than a mile from Hernandez's home.

"I forgive the hands of the people who had a hand in my son's murder - either before or after and I pray and hope that some day everybody out there will forgive them also," Lloyd's mother, Ursula Ward, told a silent courtroom during sentencing.

As the guilty verdict was read to a rapt, packed courtroom this morning, Hernandez listened stone-faced. Court officers slapped handcuffs and leg shackles on him, the sound echoing in the courtroom.

His mother held his trembling fiancée, Shayanna Jenkins, as both wept — just feet from Ward, who also had tears streaming down her face on the other side of the courtroom aisle.

Hernandez looked over and mouthed to his family, "It's ok. It's ok."

His defense attorney, James Sultan, expressionlessly rested his hand on Hernandez's back. Hernandez shook his head slightly, his legs juggling and his heavily tattooed hands loosely clasped as the judge thanked the jury afterward.

First-degree murder guarantees life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Members of the Lloyd family embraced prosecutors after the verdict was read.

The verdict triggers an automatic appeal under state law.

In the case of the 25-year-old superstar-turned-suspect — which transfixed sports fans nationwide and drew hordes of network TV cameras to the courthouse here — prosecutors had faced huge hurdles in getting a guilty verdict without an eyewitness, a murder weapon or an obvious motive.

Going up against an all-star defense team, they did not need to prove Hernandez pulled the trigger, but they did need to prove he was at the scene when the murder occurred and that he wanted it to happen. They also needed to prove the murder was committed with extreme atrocity and cruelty. It was, the jury found.

Prosecutors had called 132 witnesses during the nearly 10-week trial, displaying hundreds of pieces of evidence to detail the multimillionaire athlete's every move before and after the murder.

Prosecutors were not allowed to show jurors evidence of a 2012 double murder in Boston that Hernandez has been charged with. He faces separate first-degree murder charges in Suffolk County for those killings.

That trial is scheduled — on paper — to begin on May 28, but Suffolk District Attorney spokesman Jake Wark said the date will “be pushed back.” Prosecutors and Hernandez's defense team will work to agree on a new date, Wark said. First Assistant District Attorney Patrick Haggan and assistant district attorney Teresa Anderson will serve as prosecutors in that trial, according to Wark.

In the Bristol County case, Hernandez was arrested on June 26, 2013 after an extensive investigation into Lloyd death. The body of the former Dorchester semipro footballer was found during the late afternoon on June 17 when a high school student stumbled upon him. Police were called to the scene soon after.

The murder came almost a year after Hernandez signed a five-year, \$40 million contract with the Patriots. In 2012, the tight end had helped lead the Patriots to Super Bowl XLVI — during a season that followed his alleged murder of Daniel de Abreu and Safiro Furtado in the South End in July.

Teen charged with manslaughter in texting while driving case

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By Laura McCallister, Multimedia Produce

KANSAS CITY, MO (KCTV) -

A 16-year-old girl has been charged with manslaughter, assault and texting while driving in connection with a September 2011 fatality collision. It's a moment the young driver can never take back, and one prosecutors said could have been avoided if she'd just put down her phone. According to the Platte County prosecutor, Rachel N. Gannon, of Kansas City, was allegedly texting on her cell phone when she lost control of her vehicle and collided with a car driven by Loretta J. Larimer, 72, who was killed in the crash.

Platte County Prosecuting Attorney Eric Zahnd said Gannon was charged April 19, after having been certified to stand trial as an adult on April 16.

According to court documents, Gannon was traveling north on NW Skyview Road on Sept. 26, 2011 at approximately 3 p.m. when she struck Larimer's vehicle near Interstate 435. Gannon was allegedly looking at her cell phone and texting when she ran off the side of the road. When Gannon returned her vehicle to the road, she struck a car heading in the opposite direction.

Larimer was extricated from her car and taken to the hospital where she was pronounced dead. Her 10-year-old granddaughter was riding in the back seat of Larimer's car and suffered injuries which were not life-threatening.

"Enough lives have been shattered and ruined, and I certainly don't want to ruin this young person's life, but we want to know what happened," said John Larimer, the victim's son.

The victim's family hopes answers will finally come in Gannon's trial.

Gannon is charged with involuntary manslaughter in the second-degree, third-degree assault and texting while driving. If convicted of the manslaughter charge, Gannon faces up to four years in prison. She faces up to one year in jail on the assault charge and a \$200 fine if convicted of texting while driving.

Under Missouri law, texting while driving is only a crime for drivers under age 21. Zahnd said he believed the Missouri legislature should prohibit texting while driving for all drivers, regardless of age.

"Texting while driving is at least as dangerous as drinking and driving. We make a crime of that for anybody, no matter the age," Zahnd said. "It should also be a crime for anybody to text while driving."

Gannon posted a \$5,000 bond and surrendered her driver's license as a condition of bond. Her first court date has not been set.

The teen will be tried as an adult, based on the severity of the crime and how soon she'll come of age.

That's a decision the victim's son isn't so sure about, focusing instead on recovering from the loss of a mother, grandmother and center of a large family.

"It's better each day, but we still cannot believe this happened," John Larimer said. "We can't believe she's gone."

The charges against Gannon are merely accusations, and Gannon is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The victim's son said his niece, the 10-year-old girl injured in the crash, is recovering and doing well. He suggests having Gannon travel around to high schools in the metro area and talk to kids about the dangers of texting and driving. He believes that's a good way to hold her accountable and spread awareness among young drivers - something he said is most important. Instead, the teen could face up to four years in state prison if convicted of the involuntary manslaughter charge.

How 4 teens became murderers without killing anyone

ELKHART — April Sparks was waiting in line to pre-pay for gas at a 7-Eleven store when she overheard a conversation she didn't want to hear.

"They don't deserve that," the cashier said.

"They should spend their lives in prison," the customer in front of her said.

Sparks knew exactly whom they were talking about. The small community 160 miles north of Indianapolis seemed split on the fates of four teenagers catapulted into unwanted fame because of one stupid mistake. One of them was her son.

Sparks left, quietly, and went elsewhere to buy gas.

Her son's life changed forever on the afternoon of Oct. 3, 2012, when he and four friends broke into a house, hoping to steal some money.

They thought the house was empty. None of the teens expected an armed homeowner to be inside. None of them was armed. None foresaw a shooting. But the homeowner, who was sleeping upstairs, did rush downstairs and did fire a handgun — killing one of the teens.

And all four of the surviving teens were charged and convicted for the death. Levi Sparks, now 20; Jose Quiroz Jr., 19; Blake Layman, 18; and Anthony Sharp Jr., 20, are each serving a five-decade sentence in the Indiana Department of Correction.

They may not have pulled the trigger. But, as far as the law is concerned, the rash decision to try to score some cash turned them into murderers.

The story of the Elkhart Four — as they have come to be known — brings attention to a decades-old controversial and highly criticized, but widely used, doctrine of criminal law.

[Under Indiana's felony murder statute](#), a person can be charged with murder if someone is killed while he or she is committing or attempting to commit another crime. That crime could be arson, burglary, robbery, carjacking, human trafficking, sexual trafficking, or sex and drug crimes — acts that the law considers inherently dangerous.

Felony murder carries the same penalty as murder, but unlike a murder charge, in which intent to kill must be proven, a person can be convicted of felony murder even if the death is accidental or unintended.

Supporters say it's a useful statute, a crime deterrent and a safeguard in the criminal justice system that holds people accountable for committing dangerous acts that result in someone's death.

"We don't really want people dying and sort of shrugging our shoulders and say, 'Oh well,'" said Elkhart County Prosecutor Curtis Hill, who charged the Elkhart Four. "Part of our justice system is to bring closure and completeness in terms of what happened, why it happened and what ought to be done."

Critics say the statute, used widely in much of the country, goes against a basic principle of criminal law: culpability.

"It's one thing to say you commit a robbery or a theft. You're not saying the person is a completely innocent person," said Timothy O'Neill, a law professor at John Marshall Law School in Chicago. "Blameworthiness for theft doesn't necessarily turn a person into a murderer. There's a disconnect."

As that debate played out in Elkhart, Quiroz pleaded guilty to felony murder and was sentenced to 55 years in prison, with 10 years suspended to probation. Sparks, Layman and Sharp were convicted by a jury. All but Quiroz asked the Court of Appeals to overturn their convictions. The appeals court denied that request, but reduced their sentences.

Their fate now depends on the state's highest court. In February the defendants asked the Indiana Supreme Court to rule on their appeal. The justices have yet to issue a ruling.

George Huguely guilty of second-degree murder

Washington Post By [Mary Pat Flaherty](#), [Jenna Johnson](#) and [Justin Jouvenal](#) February 22, 2012

CHARLOTTESVILLE — Former University of Virginia lacrosse player George Huguely V was convicted of second-degree murder Wednesday and sentenced by a jury to 26 years in prison.

The jury of seven men and five women decided Huguely did not plan to kill his onetime girlfriend Yeardley Love on May 2, 2010, when he [kicked through her bedroom door](#), shook her violently, wrestled with her and left her bloodied in her bed. The 22-year-old was found dead by a roommate hours later.

Prosecutors had sought a first-degree murder conviction, while Huguely's attorneys were hoping for the lesser charge of manslaughter. The verdict is in between the two.

The case of [the two accomplished lacrosse players at a prominent university has captured national attention](#). In the small courtroom where relatives of Huguely and Love have sat across from one another for most of the month, there has been an overwhelming sense of lost promise and squandered privilege.

Huguely, 24, of Chevy Chase, stood stoic, but paler than he had been earlier in the day, as the verdict was read. [Love's mother, Sharon, and sister, Lexie, linked arms in a front-row bench](#). A whimper could be heard from Huguely's side of the courtroom, where his grandmother sat in the front row with other relatives.

Each of the jurors reached after the verdict declined to comment.