

## Shooter identified by witnesses at trial

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BY KEITH EPPS

Several witnesses yesterday fingered Brandon Lee Smith as the man who shot and killed an employee at a Fredericksburg nightspot early last year.

Smith, 20, is charged with first-degree murder and using a firearm in the commission of a felony in connection with the death of 30-year-old Dasan Richardson.

Richardson was shot in the chest with a .45-caliber handgun during an early morning altercation at Mi Casa Restaurant in Central Park on Jan. 12, 2008.

Yesterday marked the start of a scheduled three-day trial in Fredericksburg Circuit Court. Courtroom security was much heavier than usual; Smith has been linked to a local gang known as "Pound Property."

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Jennifer Ann Smith, who worked with Richardson, testified that Brandon Smith and four of his friends were denied access when they showed up for a "hip-hop" event that night.

Jennifer Smith said the group had caused trouble before and were not going to be admitted unless they paid a total of \$400 to get in.

She said one of the employees put Brandon Smith in a choke hold in removing him from the entrance. She said Smith vowed to return after being placed on the ground.

Defense attorney Stuart Sullivan suggested in his opening statement that Brandon Smith was rendered unconscious by the "sleeper hold."

Brandon Smith and his friends returned a short time later and got into a fight with restaurant security, Jennifer Smith said.

During the ensuing commotion, two shots were fired, one striking Richardson in the chest.

Jennifer Smith said she saw Brandon Smith on the ground with the gun in his hand.

She said Richardson walked back into the club, said "I've been hit" and fell to to ground. Panicked customers poured out of the building at that point.

Judge Gordon Willis granted Sullivan's request that the jury not hear Jennifer Smith's testimony about in incident that occurred two weeks earlier.

She testified out of the jury's presence that Smith had threatened to kill her and that Richardson intervened, saying, "you'll have to go through me first."

Other witnesses who implicated Smith in the shooting were clearly reluctant to do so. Keyzha Benson, the girlfriend of one of Smith's relatives, literally shook on the witness stand.

Benson said she got to the club as the fight was in progress. She said she saw Smith fire the gun.

It came out in court that Benson told Sullivan that the prosecution has pressured her to testify. She also was forced to testify before a special grand jury in Northumberland.

Marie Fields, Smith's girlfriend, was also clearly uncomfortable. She said Smith told her he took the action he did because he was being beaten and needed to "get them off me."

Smith, a Virginia State University student, was arrested eight days after the incident. His cell phone was recovered at the scene.

In his opening statement, Sullivan said the club employees caused the situation to escalate by the way they treated Smith and his friends.

Sullivan did not deny that Smith fired the fatal shot, but he scoffed at the notion that the shooting was premeditated.

The defense attorney also claimed there was a "rush to judgment" by the police to charge Smith with first-degree murder.

Travis Bird and Jeff Adams are prosecuting the case.

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