

EDITOR'S PICK

Fredericksburg teenager sentenced in Cook Out double-murder case

Scott Shenk

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In a span of 24 seconds on June 14, two men lost their lives and another suffered serious injuries.

On Tuesday, a city teenager learned the consequences of his actions that summer morning at the Cook Out restaurant in the Greenbrier Shopping Center.

After tearful testimony by family and friends on both sides, 16-year-old Jabar Ali Taylor was sentenced to 50 years for two counts of second-degree murder, malicious wounding and criminal solicitation. Fredericksburg Circuit Court Judge Gordon Willis officially gave Taylor a 72-year sentence, but suspended 22 years.

Taylor will serve his time in a juvenile facility until he turns 21. He will finish his sentence in an adult prison.

After the sentencing, defense attorney Charles Cosby said an appeal is being considered.

A jury convicted the teenager in December.

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Taylor, then 15, stabbed the three men in a fight that happened at about 2 a.m. The 24-second altercation was caught on surveillance video.

Mac Oliver Hughes, 30, of Portsmouth, Anthony J. Carter, 28, of Albany, Ga., died in the fight. Jason Edward Fitch, a Stafford County resident, survived.

Fitch's group had been at Jay's Lounge in the Greenbrier Shopping Center that night celebrating his birthday. When the lounge closed at about 2 a.m., Fitch and his friends made their way to the nearby Cook Out to get something to eat.

The Taylors and their friends believed that expletives and statements such as “pull up your pants” had been directed at them from Fitch’s group, according to testimony.

The fight began when Taylor’s older brother, Kyreem Taylor, approached the men’s vehicle in the drive-through and tried to yank the driver out, according to earlier court testimony.

During the altercation, Hughes was stabbed in the heart and Carter had a primary artery severed.

Fitch suffered four stab wounds but has since recovered.

Taylor’s attorneys argued during the trial that the teenager was defending himself and his brother.

The prosecution disputed that characterization, saying Taylor was cold and heartless.

On Tuesday, family and friends of the victims were at times overcome with emotion during testimony.

Hughes was a Navy veteran and father of two.

His father, also named Mac, said the impact of his son’s death will have “an everlasting impact” on the family.

The mothers of the younger Hughes’ two children talked about what a dedicated father he was and the terrible impact his murder has had on their lives.

Hughes’ girlfriend Lycky Calonge, who was with the group on the night of the fight, choked up when recalling how she had to tell her then-4-year-old daughter that “her daddy was taken from us.”

Family and friends of Taylor said the teenager is nothing like he was portrayed in the court proceedings and that his actions that night were out of character.

They described the former James Monroe High School student as a polite and church-going teenager who had dreams of going to culinary school.

An aunt he lived with for a time said he was a good child and that she was sorry for the “tragic accident.”

Cosby, Taylor’s attorney, pleaded for a lighter sentence than the 28-year maximum the guidelines called for.

“This is a lose–lose situation for everybody,” said Cosby, who quoted Shakespeare and philosopher Immanuel Kant in his argument.

The killings were “a brief moment in life” in which two men “tragically” lost their lives, he said.

But what Taylor did was “totally out of character” and something “sparked” by actions of the men who were stabbed.

Prosecutor Travis Bird, who is now Spotsylvania’s commonwealth’s attorney, scoffed at any notion that Taylor should receive a light sentence.

No matter the sentence, he said, Taylor has a future.

“Mac and Anthony have none,” he said.

Bird called Taylor a violent “murderer” who had been drinking alcohol and had a weapon on him the night of the fight.

Bird said the guidelines made no sense and asked the judge to impose a harsher sentence.

Before the sentence was handed down, Taylor, dressed in a dark suit, stood and addressed the court.

“I truly am sorry for what happened,” he said in a soft voice as people in the gallery choked back tears. “I see the pain that I’ve caused.”

Taylor said he talks to God every day and asks for forgiveness.

“God has forgiven me,” Taylor said.

He said he hopes the victims’ families also will find a way to forgive him.

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