

Clipping File

Murder suspect guilty

McPherson killer faces life in prison, no parole

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SAN FRANCISCO — A 21-year-old crack dealer was found guilty Wednesday of murdering Hunter McPherson.

Jurors convicted Clifton Terrell Jr. of attempting to rob McPherson, son of secretary of state-designate and former state Sen. Bruce McPherson, and of robbing his girlfriend early Nov. 17, 2001. The jury agreed with prosecutors that Terrell used a gun to commit the crimes.

Committing murder during an attempted armed robbery all but assures that Terrell will spend the rest of his life in prison with no chance of parole, prosecutors said. Sentencing is May 6.

McPherson, 27, a Harbor High and UC Berkeley graduate, was shot in the chest as he and girlfriend Alexa Savelle walked home from a friend's home on Mariposa Street about 2 a.m.

The McPherson family thanked prosecutor Harry Dorfman and the jury in a statement, but said the trial's closing does not bring closure for those who loved the victim.

"No verdicts could possibly lessen the loss of our son," the family said. "... This is another sad example of how drugs and guns don't mix."

Prosecutors alleged Terrell and a friend randomly robbed three couples that night as they drove around the city, high on Ecstasy, marijuana and alcohol. But jurors found Terrell innocent of robbing a second couple and said Wednesday



McPHERSON
Crack dealer convicted of his murder

See **VERDICT** on **PAGE A6**

A-6 SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL Thursday, March 3, 2005

Verdict

Continued from Page A1

they were undecided on attempted-robbery and robbery charges involving the third couple.

They are still deliberating those charges, though Dorfman said a decision on them "matters only for finality."

"The most serious crimes have been resolved, and appropriately so," he said.

The case against Terrell, a high school dropout from a Potrero Hill housing project who told the court he sold crack cocaine, hinged

largely on a secretly taped call he made to his mother. In the call, a sobbing Terrell said he shot "a senator's son" by mistake after he grabbed at the gun. Savelle said McPherson made no move toward the weapon.

She testified McPherson refused several demands to give his wallet to the gunman, who stole her Gucci purse. She was unable to identify the killer, and no other witnesses were found. The gun was never recovered.

Twelve days after the shooting, police arrested Terrell, then 18, and Dwayne Reed, 25. They were charged with murder, robbery and other crimes.

In a largely circumstantial case, Reed was offered a deal by prosecutors to testify against his former friend. He was released during trial, after he told jurors that Terrell shot McPherson while he waited in the car.

Terrell testified he had passed out after a three-day Ecstasy binge and remembers nothing of the night. He said he called his mother from the police department after becoming convinced by Reed and police that he had killed McPherson. Detectives lied and told him he had been identified as the killer, he said.

Defense attorneys claimed Reed committed the killing, then

pinned it on Terrell. Defense attorney Steve Scherr declined comment Wednesday.

During the preliminary hearing on the charges, Judge Kay Tsenin ruled that statements the men made to police were inadmissible. The judge agreed with their attorneys that over-zealous police had violated the men's rights during questioning.

The McPhersons said Hunter was "the most caring, loving, likable, humble, God-loving person one could ever meet."

They said they remember him every hour of every day.

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