

Killer gets 48-year sentence

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By KEITH EPPS

A judge yesterday sentenced John L. Seay to 48 years in prison for killing his former girlfriend last year as she desperately tried to get away.

Judge Ann Hunter Simpson said she took into account Seay's sorrowful apology for the killing, but found no reason to reduce the sentence recommended by a jury at his three-day murder trial in May.

The jury convicted Seay, 24, of first-degree murder, abduction and using a firearm in the commission of a felony in connection with the June 27, 2004, slaying of 19-year-old Mary Yurksis.

She was shot eight times in a yard on Mine Road in Spotsylvania County as she pleaded with strangers for help.

"I don't understand why this happened, but a civilized society cannot allow this type of reaction to occur without severe consequences," Simpson said.

Just before Simpson announced her decision, defense attorney Mark Gardner read a statement from Seay that brought tears to the eyes of people on both sides of the courtroom. Gardner said Seay was too upset to read the statement himself.

"I am sorry for what has happened. If you know the real John Seay, you know that was not me on that night," the statement read.

" My heart has been shattered. Whatever is left of it goes out to [Yurksis'] family."

According to the evidence, Seay and Yurksis had been to a fast-food restaurant that evening before returning to the motel where she was staying. A witness said they were arguing and Seay drove away with her in the van.

A short time later, a teenager driving on Mine Road saw Yurksis roll out of the van and yell for help.

Yurksis went to a nearby residence, where she banged on a door and told the residents to call for help because Seay was going to kill her.

She was shot in the back as she ran away from Seay, witnesses said.

Seay testified that he remembered everything up to the shooting. He said he had been emotionally shattered by her dating other men, and claimed that Yurksis had actually pulled the gun on him first.

After Gardner's request for a new trial was denied yesterday, he urged Simpson to reduce the jury's sentencing recommendation, which was higher than what state sentencing guidelines call for.

He pointed out the case of Donna Blanton, who was found guilty May 11 of shooting her husband, Virginia State Police 1st Sgt. Taylor V. Blanton, in their bedroom in 2003. A jury recommended 28 years in prison.

Prosecutor Stuart Sullivan argued that Seay deserved every year the jury recommended.

"This was a crime of a very public nature," Sullivan said. "He chose to shoot her eight times on the lawn of someone who didn't know either one of them."

Gardner said that Seay would appeal his conviction. Seay, who said nothing yesterday, blew a kiss to his supporters as he was led from the courtroom.

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