

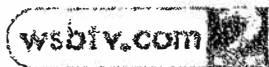
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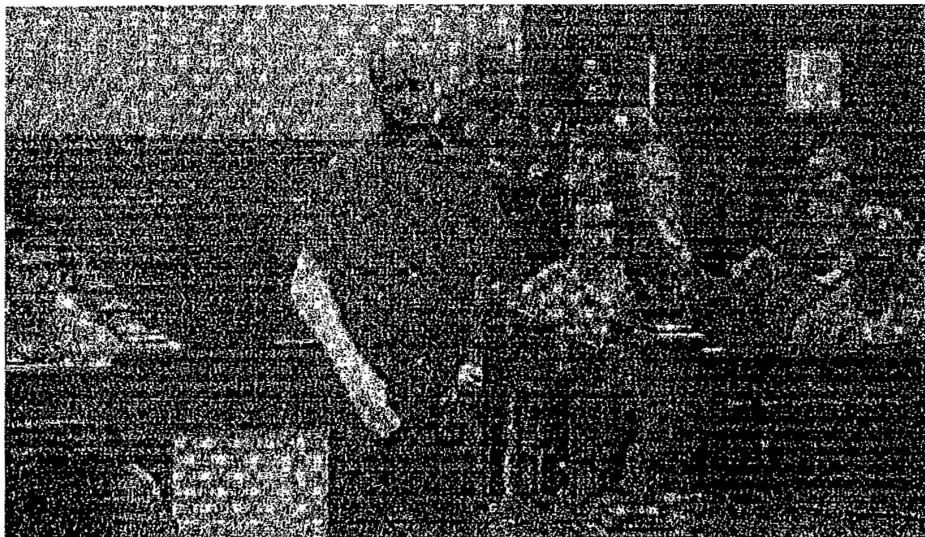
11 a.m. 48°

2 p.m. 53°

- 5-Day Forecast
- Stormtracker 2
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Posted: 5:39 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 26, 2012

Jury deliberates case of woman burned alive



By Tom Jones

ATLANTA — A Clayton County jury is deliberating the case of a man accused of pouring gasoline on his girlfriend and setting her on fire.

Thirty-year-old Orville Brooks faces nearly 200 years in prison if convicted.

Police said he saturated his 21-year-old girlfriend, Tara Best, with gasoline after the two argued in their apartment last year.

Clayton County District Attorney Tracy Graham Lawson told the jury, "Guilty people run. Innocent people stay."

During her closing argument, Lawson said that Brooks ran from the scene after setting the fire in the Brookstone Apartments.

Lawson also told the jury that testimony from a friend who said Brooks confessed to him is additional proof.

"I poured gas and I lit her on fire, that's what Mr. Saxon said," Lawson reminded the panel.

Best suffered burns over 70 percent of her body and was on life support for three months after the fire.

Assistant District Attorney Mike Thurston recounted for the jury how Brooks beat Best and then pushed her into a bathtub and began pouring the gasoline.

"She's looking up at him striking that match as she's engulfed in flames," Thurston said.

Best testified Brooks was controlling and abusive, but Brooks' attorney, Rand Csehy, said the state has it all wrong. Csehy said Brooks never doused Best with gasoline.

"They failed in proof and they failed Tara Best," Rand Csehy said. "Had a dousing occurred it would have exploded the apartment complex."

Csehy said his client poured gas on her clothes and Brooks, in a fit of anger, flicked his lighter to scare Best. He told the jury that's when the vapors from the gasoline ignited, accidentally burning Best. Brooks took the stand during the trial and denied he intentionally doused Best with gasoline.

Lawson said jurors have more reason to believe Best's version of what happened since so much evidence and testimony corroborates her version of what happened.

"Believe her, he's guilty. Believe him, he's not guilty," she said.

Brooks faced life plus 207 years in prison if convicted but a kidnapping charge was dismissed, lowering the maximum sentence to 187 years in prison.

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