



Judge upholds jury's death sentence for killer of honor student

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PRINCETON, Ky. (AP) - A judge imposed the death penalty Friday on a man who had admitted to abducting, raping and murdering a high school honor student and cheerleader.

Robert Keith **Woodall**, 23, who was previously convicted of a sex offense involving a child, pleaded guilty in Caldwell Circuit Court on April 10 to one count each of capital murder, rape and kidnapping. A jury deliberated for an hour before sentencing him to death on July 20.

Sarah **Hansen**, a 16-year-old student at Muhlenberg South High School, disappeared after leaving a Greenville video store on Jan. 25, 1997. Her body was found in a nearby lake a short time later.

The girl apparently was attacked in the minivan she was driving. Her throat was deeply slashed with a box cutter.

"I think the jury made the right decision in this case," Judge Bill Cunningham said in his chambers after the hearing.

Woodall declined an opportunity to speak in the somber courtroom and had no reaction as Cunningham imposed the death sentence on the capital murder count.

Woodall's IQ has been measured at 78. In **Kentucky**, no one with an IQ lower than 70 can be sentenced to death.

The judge also imposed two prison sentences of life with no possibility of parole for 20 years on both the rape and kidnapping counts.

Cunningham told **Woodall** during the hearing that he had considered not imposing the death penalty because of the defendant's guilty pleas. But

the judge said the brutal nature of the crime and **Woodall**'s lack of remorse led him, for the first time in his seven years on the bench, to impose death.

"The jury and the court have to make decisions based on the evidence presented to them," Cunningham said. "And I have yet to hear the defendant say, 'I'm sorry.'"

Before the sentences were imposed, Commonwealth's Attorney Ralph Vick told the court that death was the appropriate penalty in this case.

Jill Giordano, one of two lawyers who represented **Woodall**, unsuccessfully asked the judge to reduce the jury's death-penalty sentence to life in prison with no possibility of parole. The judge could also have sentenced **Woodall** to life with no possibility of parole for 25 years on the murder count.

Ms. Giordano declined to talk to reporters after the hearing, as did members of the **Woodall** and **Hansen** families.

Law officers said after Ms. **Hansen** was attacked in the minivan, she was then carried or dragged about 700 feet to the lake, leaving a bloody trail to the water. An autopsy found water in her lungs, indicating she drowned.

The crime occurred in Muhlenberg County but the trial was moved to Caldwell County because of pretrial publicity.

Woodall was sentenced in 1992 to five years in prison for sexual contact with a girl under age 12. He was released 3 1/2 years later.

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