



Arrest made; Police say slaying appears to be random act

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GREENVILLE, Ky. (AP) - The man charged in the rape, kidnapping and murder of a high school cheerleader had served three years in a Kentucky prison on sexual abuse charges.

Robert Keith Woodall, 22 of Greenville, had been free for less than a year before his arrest in the death of Sarah Hansen.

A public defender, Mark Baker, entered an innocent plea on behalf of Woodall today in Muhlenberg District Court to all charges. Judge Charles Ehlschide scheduled a preliminary hearing for Feb. 5 and ordered Woodall held without bond until then.

Woodall appeared in court amid heavy security but did not speak.

Court documents show that Woodall pleaded guilty Feb. 19, 1993, to two counts of first-degree sexual abuse and was sentenced to five years in the penitentiary.

Woodall was originally indicted in that case on five charges, but prosecutors agreed to dismiss three counts. A judge denied a request for supervised, so-called "shock" probation for Woodall, and he was released from the Department of Corrections on Feb. 20, 1996.

Police said today that tips from the public helped lead them to Woodall in the current crime. His arrest late Tuesday night was announced at a news conference early today.

In the days following the discovery of Sarah's body Saturday night, police appealed repeatedly for help from the public, saying they had few leads and no suspects.

"We made an appeal for information," Kentucky State Police Trooper Bryan Pitney said this morning. "And we definitely got it."

He would not say specifically what information led to Woodall's arrest. He said police do not believe Sarah knew Woodall.

"We cannot right now really establish any connection," Pitney said. "When we approached this investigation, we said that it was a random act of violence. And we still believe it was a random act of violence."

The girl's body was pulled from Luzerne Lake on Saturday night. An autopsy showed the girl died of "multiple cut wounds" inflicted with some sharp instrument, possibly a knife.

She had left home about 7:30 p.m. CST Saturday to rent a video. About two hours later, her parents grew worried and called police. Authorities found the family's abandoned minivan just outside the city limits, then discovered her body.

"We have hard evidence from the van linking (Woodall) him to the murder," said Pitney, who would not elaborate.

The family's home, the video store and the lake are within about one mile of each other.

Pitney said the girl's parents were notified early this morning of the arrest. He said no other arrests are expected.

"All our evidence right now points to just one person that committed the murder," Pitney said.

Although the news conference announcing Woodall's arrest did not begin until shortly after midnight, about 50 spectators attended, including fellow cheerleaders and classmates from Muhlenberg South High School.

The funeral for Sarah was scheduled at 2 p.m. CST today at the Greenville Methodist Church. A memorial service was held Tuesday evening.

Earlier Tuesday, dozens of law enforcement officials fanned out around Luzerne Lake looking for the weapon that killed the girl. None was found.

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