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**JURY DECIDES SENTENCES FOR 2 IN PARKING LOT MURDER**

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CHESAPEAKE - A **jury** took less than an hour Saturday to decide how much prison time to give the men they convicted the night before in connection with Timothy Puckett's 1999 "road-rage" murder.

Gordon Blackman, 25, should serve 28 years for shooting and killing Puckett in the parking lot of the Village Square Shopping Center, they said. Ryan Sullivan, 31, should serve five years for kicking Puckett as he was dying. They will be formally sentenced by Circuit Judge Russell I. Townsend Jr. in October. Both men plan to appeal.

The unusual Saturday deliberation brought to a close four weeks of intense arguments between attorneys. The joint trial began July 22 with five days of motions and was the longest anyone could recall in the city's Circuit Court.

Tried separately, each man's case may have taken half the time, said defense attorneys Andrew Sacks and Andrew Protogyrou, who opposed the joint trial.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Fred Talbot said the single trial brought closure for Puckett's family after a three-year ordeal.

In the courtroom, Puckett's friends and family kept their emotions under careful control. After hearing the **jury**'s decisions, they hugged and left the courthouse together, many arm-in-arm.

Joining the trials also made sense economically, Talbot said, because of witnesses who had to take time off work or travel to the area to testify.

Sacks said he wasn't sure how much actually was saved. In the future, he said, he hopes prosecutors won't join trials unless the charges the defendants face are more similar.

Sacks and Protogyrou said they were relieved that the **jury** didn't impose maximum **sentences** on their clients.

They could have recommended life imprisonment for Blackman. His minimum **sentence** by law would have been 23 years. First-degree murder carries a minimum of 20 years, but he also was convicted on a gun charge, which carries an automatic three years.

Sullivan faced 20 years, but the five years he received was the shortest **sentence** that the **jury** could impose.

Blackman and Sullivan both testified during the trial that they weren't at the shopping center when Puckett, 24, was killed.

In the end, Talbot said, jurors believed eyewitnesses who said they were sure the two cousins were the men Puckett encountered on the day he died.

Blackman and Sullivan, witnesses said, were backing out of a parking space that Saturday in September 1999, when the Toyota Camry they were in nearly hit Puckett's truck. Soon Puckett and Sullivan were out of their vehicles arguing, witnesses testified.

Sullivan punched Puckett and a fistfight began, according to testimony. Puckett's friend John Jordan broke up the fight by using a wrestling move on Sullivan and dragging him across the parking lot, witnesses said.

Blackman got out of the Toyota and walked toward the fight. Seconds later, he went back to the car and returned with a gun, witnesses said. He fired once, striking Puckett in the left arm.

The bullet pierced Puckett's left lung and heart and lodged in his right lung. He died shortly afterward in a hospital.

Before jurors deliberated his client's punishment Saturday, Sacks told jurors that he thought 23 years of missed Christmases, Thanksgivings, Easters and birthdays would be just punishment for Blackman.

But Talbot disagreed.

"That's incorrect," the prosecutor said. "He won't miss them . . . he's still alive."

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**Description of illustration(s):**

Graphics

Color photo

**WHAT HAPPENED**

Jurors deliberated for an hour to suggest **sentence** lengths in the case of Timothy Puckett's death, shown. They suggested that Gordon Blackman serve 28 years and Ryan Sullivan serve five years. The judge will formally **sentence** the two in October.

REACTION

In the courtroom, Timothy Puckett's friends and family kept their emotions under careful control. After hearing the **jury's** decisions, they hugged and left the courthouse together, many arm-in-arm.

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