

Jury recommends life for local murder

Judge will hand down sentence on May 15

By Jeff Haldiman

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Life without parole.

A Cole County jury made that recommendation for Christopher Harris, 32, on Thursday after finding him guilty of first-degree murder.

He was convicted of killing Morland Jefferson, 43, at 812 Broadway St. last May.

It took the jury of 11 women and one man around four hours to reach

a decision.

Cole County Judge Tom Brown presided over the case.

Harris pleaded not guilty to the murder last July. Prosecutor Bill Tackett said the circumstances didn't meet the legal requirements for the death penalty in this case.

In closing arguments Tackett told jurors that the evidence satisfied the qualifications for first-degree murder. He noted that a video taped confession that the jurors saw showed the demeanor of Harris shortly after the crime and that the chief witness for the defense, Dr. A.E. Daniel, did not view that tape

prior to examining Harris several months after the crime.

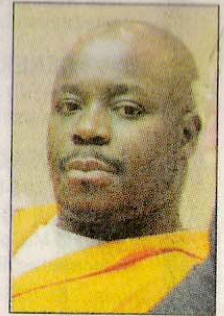
"Motive is clear and the steps are clear," he said. "Common sense shows Harris acted deliberately."

Public Defender Jan King told jurors in his closing argument that it wasn't necessary for his witness to view the tape because all evidence shows Harris lost his temper. "There have been more red herrings dragged in front of you than I've ever seen," he said. "This is simply case of what happens when someone loses their temper."

Harris' defense was that he was in a rage and under the influence of

drugs and alcohol when he killed his neighbor last year.

The case against Harris opened Wednesday when Assistant Prosecutor Kurt Valentine told the jury members they would hear testimony that showed Harris hit Jefferson on the head with a hammer several times and threw



Harris faces life

Please see Murder, p. 3

Murder: Other charge pends

Continued from p. 1

him down some stairs at the apartment building where the two men lived.

Harris then dragged Jefferson up the stairs to his apartment, where his throat was cut with a knife.

Jefferson City Police Det. Marc Edwards testified that Harris told him he and Jefferson were talking in front of the apartment building before the killing took place and that Jefferson was making allegations that Harris had stolen items from his apartment and that those comments were getting on his nerves.

According to Edwards, Harris said he told Jefferson he would hit him in the head if he didn't shut up.

Dr. Eddie Adelstein, deputy Boone County medical examiner, did the autopsy on Jeffer-

son and said the cause of death was blunt trauma to the head and the cutting of the carotid artery.

Tackett asked Adelstein if the victim could have died from blunt trauma alone, which Adelstein said was possible, but it was the slashing of the throat that actually caused the death in this case.

Tackett said cutting the throat showed there was premeditation.

Harris will be sentenced May 15 before Judge Brown. He is also facing charges for stabbing his former girlfriend, Yoshi Rucker, in front of 812 Broadway on March 19 of last year. Last June Rucker testified that Harris stabbed her in the right lung following a domestic dispute. Harris could get 10 years to life for that crime.

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