

Mixed reactions

Families, friends offer different takes on jury's verdict, sentencing ideas

By Bob Watson

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Patrick Middaugh's mother sobbed as her son — also crying — was led from the courtroom in handcuffs Friday afternoon.

A nine-woman, three-man Cole County jury recommended Middaugh serve sentences of five years for second-degree assault and 25 years each for first-degree robbery and armed criminal action, for the teen's role in last June's assault of pizza delivery driver Alan McCullough.

"They stole half my baby's life," Mary Ann Crawford cried to a reporter. "I'm sorry what happened to her son, but she still has him."

But, Connie McCullough had told the jury during Friday afternoon's sentencing-phase hearing, her son now is "different. He's got a different personality — he's not the Alan I raised. ...

"He has snapped at me several times (and) has said things to me that he knows he shouldn't have said. He's rude and he's hateful."

Experts say personality changes often are a side effect of
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severe head injuries like McCullough suffered when he was beaten with a steel pipe.

The McCulloughs declined to be interviewed after the trial.

Crawford's best friend, Annette Boardman, said she's lost her faith in the criminal justice system after the two-day trial.

"That courtroom was a joke," she told a reporter.

"There wasn't an attorney that could remember a name," she added, referring to several instances by both prosecutors and defense lawyers who confused Middaugh's last name with McCullough's, or who called Middaugh "Ronald Bell," the name of the other man convicted in the assault case and now serving a life prison sentence.

Boardman added: "I didn't think that, if they couldn't prove in court that Patrick did anything physically, that that man (Prosecutor Bill Tackett) could stand there and create a scene in the mind of the jury — in his wonderful shock value of throwing down that pipe that Patrick never touched — and create a scene in their mind that didn't exist."

But, Tackett told reporters, "What I described to the jury was a type of person, and do we want that type of person out walking around and not incarcerated?"

Tackett said jurors "understood that someone who would watch a pizza man walk up to the porch, knowing they would be brutally beaten with a pipe and then hit with their own club — that type of person is so cold-blooded they have to go to

prison."

Tackett said his description was based on the evidence.

Boardman said of the long sentence suggestions: "Two wrongs don't make a right. ... I know he's not a child, and he made a very poor choice."

Tackett said he was pleased with the sentence suggestions.

"They came up with a verdict of 25 years — given the age of the defendant and the lack of a prior (criminal) history I think is very appropriate."

He said prosecutors would ask Joyce to impose the sentences to be served consecutively.

"We think it warrants it," he said. "There were a lot of witnesses, and they really painted a picture that was pretty gruesome — not just the beating, but the aftermath."