

Man convicted in Hardee's robbery

By RICK BROWN
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A Cole County jury deliberated 30 minutes on Monday before convicting a St. Louis man of first-degree armed robbery.

The panel of eight men and four women found Eugene Harrell Sardis, 21, guilty of robbing Hardee's, 3601 Country Club Dr., on the night of Feb. 13.

The jury recommended a sentence of 30 years for Sardis, who was taken into custody at the end of a one-day trial in Cole County Circuit Court. The law allowed the jury to suggest anywhere from 10 to 30 years or life.

"Only you can stop this garbage," said assistant prosecutor Bill Tackett, urging the jury to impose a stiff penalty.

"When your son or daughter goes to work at a fast food place, what message can you send so that ... they won't be staring down the barrel of a gun?" asked Tackett.

Circuit Judge Thomas J. Brown III will pass final sentence later on Sardis, the third man to be found or plead guilty in connection with the armed robbery. His 20-year-old brother, Andre I. Sardis, and James M. Capes, 23, Sturgeon,

also await sentencing in the case.

Brown found Capes guilty of first-degree robbery at a trial in September. Capes could receive up to 30 years or life.

Andre Sardis, of Columbia, pleaded guilty in September to second-degree robbery for his part in the holdup. He could receive a sentence of five to 15 years.

Andre Sardis, who once worked at the restaurant, testified Monday that he and his brother planned the robbery with Capes during a meeting in Columbia. Sardis alleged the three men drove to Jefferson City, where his brother and Capes robbed the Hardee's night manager at gunpoint.

Andrew Smith, the manager finishing his shift, testified that two masked men confronted him outside the restaurant after closing time.

Smith, who now lives in Alabama, said it was Eugene Sardis who pointed a gun at him and demanded money.

"He said 'Don't make me blow your brains out,'" Smith testified.

Andre Sardis testified that he was outside with the getaway car while the robbery was taking place. Capes and Andre Sardis were

arrested running away from the restaurant police arrived. Police apprehended Eugene Sardis the following day in Columbia.

Andre's wife, Donna Sardis, testified that she picked up Eugene Sardis at a Jefferson City apartment complex near Hardee's on the night of the robbery. He called her at her Columbia home to ask for a ride after the holdup was over, she said.

Defense attorney Joan Gummels didn't call any witnesses to the stand for the defense, but argued to the jury that Andre and Donna Sardis concocted their stories so Andre would be offered a lighter sentence in exchange for his testimony.

"The state has not met its burden of proof that Eugene was at the scene, let alone with a gun in his hand," said Ms. Gummels.

"I don't see any question that he's the guilty man," Tackett said, "but you'd have to say he was not even at the scene" to find him not guilty.

Eugene Sardis was being held in the county jail in lieu of \$50,000 bond. His sentencing was set for Nov. 22.