

## **WOODSON TRIAL**

By Nick Martin

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RIVERSIDE — Following a tense two-hour trial Saturday at the Riverside County Courthouse, Pikesville resident Jesse Woodson was convicted of assaulting an 18-year-old high school student with a deadly weapon, during a confrontation last March.

The victim, Jane Smith, had difficulty adjusting to Pikesville after moving from out of state. She was involved in a series of conflicts with a group of her fellow students, and lodged complaints with the school concerning the group for acts of bullying and harassment both at school and online.

Smith's woes escalated on Feb. 21 when she interrupted a burglary in her home, resulting in one of the trespassers grabbing her hair and threatening to "brick her good." Smith testified that the voice sounded like Woodson's.

According to the prosecution, on March 13 Woodson, 29, followed Smith to an alley on her way home from school and attempted to prevent her from speaking about the break-in by smashing the back of her head with a brick found nearby, leaving her unconscious for two days.

In a passionate summation, prosecuting attorney Emily Robinson underscored the strength of the government's case. "Our evidence is as solid as the weapon in this case," Robinson said. "To assault someone is criminal, but for an adult to hit a young female with a brick is simply unforgivable."

In response, the defense attempted to cast doubt on the certainty of the government's case, offering one of Smith's classmates as an alternative suspect and positing that the left-handed injury could not have been made by the right-handed Woodson, according to forensic pathologist and defense expert witness Dr. Brooke Crane.

"There is a difference between storytellers and tellers of stories," said defense attorney Miles Cook in his summation. "A storyteller knows what to leave out. Unfortunately for the prosecution, we know what they wanted to leave out of this trial and we did not allow them to keep it from the court."

The key piece of incriminating evidence linking Woodson to the crime was brick dust matching the assault weapon found under the defendant's nails and on her hips by the lead detective on the case, Frankie Cooper.

In a pre-trial motion, the defense attempted to have the dust sample removed from evidence, arguing that police failed to follow proper procedures. After a rebuttal by prosecuting attorney Kenna Little, the motion was dismissed.

Interviewed following the bench trial, Judge Brian Hill explained, "The evidence was overwhelming. I think it was probably a mistake to put Woodson on the stand, but I'm sure his lawyers felt they had no choice but to give it a try."

No date has been set for sentencing.