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Weddle had 11 prior drunk driving convictions

Jury convicts truck driver in fatal tractor-trailer crash

By Stephen Betts | Jan 30, 2018



Photo by: Stephen Betts

ROCKLAND — A Knox County jury found a Tennessee truck driver guilty Tuesday, Jan. 30, of causing the deaths of two local residents.

The jury deliberated for two hours Monday afternoon and returned Tuesday morning for an additional 90 minutes of deliberations before rendering its verdict in the trial of 55-year-old Randall Junior Weddle of Greeneville, Tenn.

Weddle was convicted on all counts -- two counts of manslaughter, three counts of aggravated operating under the influence, two counts of driving to endanger and eight counts of various trucking rule violations. Those violations include false record-keeping, driving while fatigued, driving while using alcohol and driving while possessing alcohol.

He could face up to 30 years in prison when he is sentenced March 29. Weddle has 11 prior convictions for operating under the influence or driving while under the influence, District Attorney Jonathan Liberman said after the verdict.

The charges stem from a March 18, 2016, crash that claimed the lives of 45-year-old Christina Torres-York of Warren and 74-year-old Paul Fowles of Owls Head. Tracy Cook of Union was injured, sustaining multiple broken bones and a concussion from the crash that occurred on Route 17 in Washington.

The District Attorney's Office had made an initial offer to Weddle last year of 30 years with all but 20 years suspended, but Weddle rejected that offer.

Defense attorney Jeremy Pratt said he wants to file a report prior to sentencing on behalf of his client.

Liberman said after the verdict that the initial sentencing offer has expired. He said he has not developed a firm recommendation yet but will have one prior to sentencing.



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"This was a team effort with the work of the Maine State Police, Knox County Sheriff's Office and the leadership of (Assistant District Attorney) Jeff Baroody," Liberman said,

The prosecutor said facts of this case as well as Weddle's history will play a role in the recommended sentence. The 11 OUI/DWI convictions will play a role in that recommendation.

Weddle has been held at the Knox County Jail in Rockland since his arrest in May 2016.

The victim witness advocate said after the verdict that family members did not want to comment. There were 20 family and friends of the victims in the courtroom Tuesday awaiting the verdict.

Officers with the state police also waited for the verdict.

In his closing arguments Monday, Liberman said the fatal crash was not a random act.

"This was not the fault of bad road construction. This was not a random act of God," Liberman said. "The man responsible is sitting in this room."

Liberman cited the testimony of witnesses about Weddle's blood-alcohol level and findings on the speed of the tractor-trailer he was driving.

"Randall Weddle made a series of reckless decisions and took everyone else on the ride with him," Liberman said.

Defense attorney Jeremy Pratt said the state had failed to prove that Weddle had acted in a way that was a gross deviation from what a reasonable and prudent person would have done. He said the state's case was based on a lot of conjecture, surmising and assumptions.

The defense called only one witness, Dr. Joann Samson, an expert on toxicology. She testified that the amount of prescribed oxycodone taken by Weddle would not have added to the impact of any alcohol he had consumed.

Weddle did not testify at the trial, which began Tuesday, Jan. 23.

Testimony during the trial included results of blood-alcohol tests that showed he had a 0.090 level immediately after the crash and 0.073 a few hours later in a test taken at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston, where he had been flown by a LifeFlight helicopter

There was also testimony that Weddle was traveling at a minimum of 69 miles per hour when he lost control of the 1996 Freightliner tractor-trailer truck on a curve by Fitch Road. The trailer was carrying lumber. The truck has been traveling at 81 miles per hour less than 30 seconds before the crash.

Liberman said the speed alone was enough to find Weddle guilty of manslaughter, but that when taken together with his consumption of alcohol, drugs, and being ill and fatigued, should result in a guilty verdict.

The prosecutor referred to the testimony of two witnesses who survived the crash, Tracy Cook and Tracy Morgan. He said they were the lucky ones, despite the trauma they experienced. He said Torres-York and Fowles lost their lives because of Weddle.

Weddle is represented by attorneys Pratt, Christopher MacLean and Laura Shaw of Camden.

Justice William Stokes presided over the trial.



Comments (4)

POSTED BY: DEBORAH CLARISSE MORRISON | Feb 01, 2018 14:43

I was thinking the same thing as Kellie...I think whoever hired him should hold some of this burden. Someone like that should never have been able to get his commercial license, let alone drive a standard vehicle!

POSTED BY: ARNOLD A KINNEY | Jan 31, 2018 12:55

This is Kelli, not Arnold posting. What I would like to know who in their RIGHT MIND hired him with THAT MANY prior OUI/DUI charges? If I were family of the INNOCENT PEOPLE who lost their LIVES I'd be filing civil suits against the STATES who gave him his licenses over n over and the company he was driving for... Again, this is KELLI KINNEY, not Arnold...

POSTED BY: MARY A MCKEEVER | Jan 30, 2018 15:57

Justice at last, Thank God Almighty, Justice at last! Blessings to the family of Fowles and York.

30 years is not enough time for the taking of 2 lives. He knew he was in the wrong. No remorse.

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