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MIAMI-DADE COURTS: Murder charges dropped in 2007 double killing

Prosecutors dropped murder charges against a teen accused of shooting two people to death at a rented Miami banquet hall in 2007.

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Article Text:

Of the hundreds of graduation party revelers who celebrated on a deadly night in June 2007, few cooperated with Miami police. And the one who mattered most later recanted his testimony.

On Monday, the prospect of solving the double murder at the Polish American Hall dimmed considerably: Prosecutors dropped charges against the only person facing trial for the shootings.

Labron Brown, 18, left a Miami-Dade courtroom with a big grin. He locked arms with his mother. She erupted into tears.

"It's been so long," said Shawntrel Yearby. "I don't know what to say."

Prosecutors and police said the case became unwinnable when their chief witness, Kenneth Joel Edwards, suddenly recanted and they were left with no other witness. "People need to stop being cowards and come forward," said Trina Kancey, whose son, Samuel Brown, 16, was shot to death at the hall. "How can we expect this violence to end if no one comes forward?"

As she has for two years, Kancey lamented the "no snitch" mentality that often grips the inner city. Her son would have turned 19 on Tuesday. She plans to release 19 white balloons at the cemetery where he is buried.

"His mom got to embrace him," she said of Labron Brown's court appearance Monday. "I can't do that with my son."

Brown had been charged with two counts of second-degree murder and carrying a concealed firearm.

He was accused in the slayings of Samuel Brown, no relation to Labron, and Michael Bradshaw, 20, who were killed inside the hall, 1250 NW 22nd Ave. Four other teens were wounded.

The shootings happened just after 1 a.m. Le-Tray Addison, 17, told police he was counting money when a "red-skin dude with a red shirt on . . . with dreads" tried to steal the money. A shoving match broke out. The robber ripped off the teen's gold chain.

That's when Bradshaw and Samuel Brown stepped in to break up the fight. A second teen joined in the shoving -- then whipped out a gun and started shooting.

Edwards, who had driven Labron Brown and two others to the party, initially told detectives he saw Labron with a gun earlier in the night -- and saw him fire his weapon during the melee.

But later, at the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, he claimed detectives pressured him to lie. Police denied the claim.

The damage to the case was done.

"This is a personal defeat," prosecutor Gary Winston said Monday. "I wanted to bring some relief to this family, but I'm very sorry that I can't. It's terribly sad."

After the recantation, Winston pressed on even as a judge allowed Brown out on bond after he had spent 15 months in jail. Investigators had hoped to strengthen the case. But nothing new emerged -- and too many unknowns remained.

Many partygoers refused to detail what happened, including Addison, whose chain was snatched.

"Unfortunately, that's the hand we're dealt every day," said Miami police homicide Lt. John Buhrmaster. "We continue to have our guys work themselves to the bone and try to make these cases with minimal evidence -- and when we make them, witnesses ultimately get scared off."

Bullets casings also showed that at least one other gun was fired that night.

Tips identified a youth nicknamed Chinaman, later identified as Letravis Turnquist, 21, as a possible suspect. Edwards also said an armed teen known only as Nard was also involved in the fight.

Turnquist was shot to death in an unrelated case in December.

Labron Brown's lawyer, Andrew Rier, insists his client spent jail time "for a crime he did not commit."

"He is a remarkable young man in that he has no bitterness and merely is seeking to move on with his life," Rier said.

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