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WAUKESHA CHRISTMAS PARADE ATTACK

BROOKS GUILTY

CONVICTED ON ALL 76 COUNTS

Last-minute move for mistrial fails; victims glad for justice

By Brian Huber
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WAUKESHA — Darrell Brooks Jr., the man behind the Waukesha Christmas Parade incident, was convicted of all the charges against him Wednesday.

Brooks, 40, stared without an expression from behind his face mask, then bowed his head into his hands clasped at his forehead as Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Dorow read the 76 guilty verdicts against him. The jury deliberated for just under two hours before breaking Tuesday night, then deliberated a little more than an hour Wednesday before word of a verdict was announced.

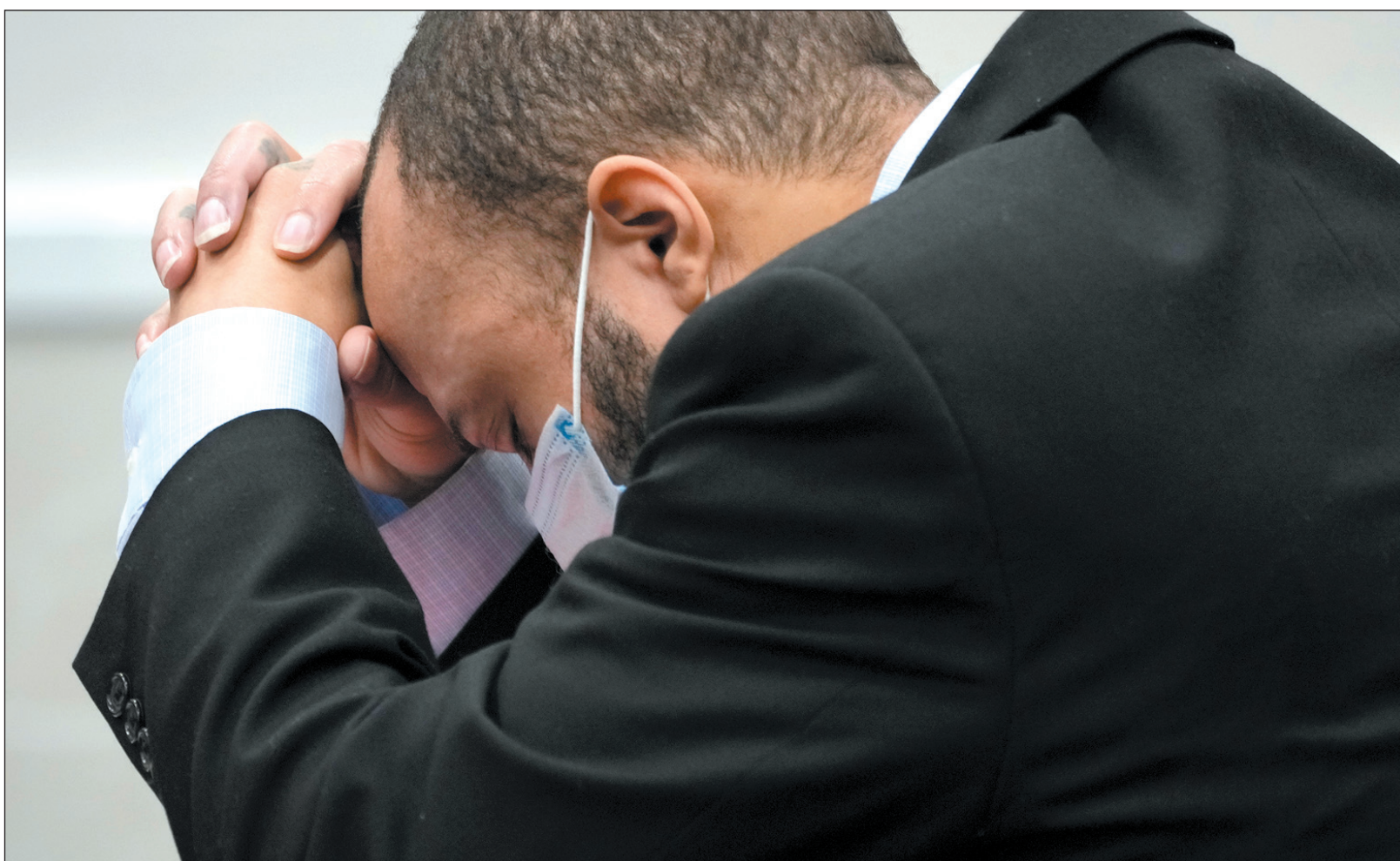
It took Dorow the better part of 30 minutes or more to read the verdicts. At one point as she did so, a man in the courtroom yelled, "Burn in hell, you piece of sh**!" Dorow ordered the man removed immediately.

Brooks was charged with six counts of homicide by the use of a dangerous weapon, six counts of hit-and-run causing death, 61 counts of first-degree recklessly endangering safety using a dangerous weapon, two felony counts of bail jumping and one misdemeanor count of battery after he plowed his mother's red Ford Escape through the route of the Waukesha Christmas Parade last Nov. 21 in an incident that attracted international attention. It cost Virginia Sorenson, Tamara Durand, Wilhelm Hospel, LeAnna Owens, Jane Kulich and Jackson Sparks their lives, and dozens more were injured.

See VERDICT, PAGE 6A

More inside

- ▶ Former DA Paul Bucher's insights on verdict. **6A**
- ▶ Community reaction. **7A**
- ▶ Timeline of events. **7A**



Mike De Sisti/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Darrell Brooks reacts as the guilty verdict is read during his trial in Waukesha County Circuit Court in Waukesha on Wednesday.



Mike De Sisti/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Dorow reads the verdicts for all 76 counts against Darrell Brooks during his trial in Waukesha County Circuit Court on Wednesday. Brooks, who represented himself during the trial, was charged with driving into the Waukesha Christmas Parade last year, killing six people and injuring dozens more. The jury found him guilty on all counts.



Mike De Sisti/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

A container holding the ashes of Virginia "Ginny" Sorenson, one of the Dancing Grannies killed in the Waukesha Christmas Parade, sits on the ledge between the gallery and the courtroom as the verdict is read during Darrell Brooks' trial in Waukesha County Circuit Court in Waukesha on Wednesday.

INDEX

- Business.....**5B**
- Classified.....**6B**
- Commentary.....**4A**
- Crossword.....**4B**
- Dilbert.....**5B**
- House & Home.....**4B**
- Lottery.....**2A**
- Obituaries.....**5A**
- Sports.....**1B**
- Stocks.....**5B**
- TimeOut.....**8B**
- Weather.....**8A**

Volume 164 No. 153

Fun Things To Do This Weekend

"Clue on Stage," 7:30 p.m. today, Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sunset Playhouse, 700 Wall St., Elm Grove. <https://sunsetplayhouse.com>, 262-782-4430

"The Play that Goes Wrong," 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday, Waukesha Civic Theatre, 264 W. Main St., Waukesha. 262-547-0708, www.waukeshacivictheatre.org

Trick or Treat at The Corners, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, The Corners of Brookfield, 20111 W. Bluemound Road, Town of Brookfield

Trunk or Treat, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, The Church at Waukesha, 2816 Madison St., Waukesha. There will be a Hallowed House that

offers a trip through time, refreshments, balloon animals, face painting. Waukeshachurch.org

Downtown Waukesha Trick-or-Treat, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, downtown Waukesha.

Waukesha Farmers Market, 8 a.m. to noon Saturday, corner of West St. Paul Avenue and West Broadway. Final market of the season.

"Spooky Space," 11 a.m. to noon Saturday and **"Space Aliens: Looking for Life in the Universe,"** 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Horwitz-DeRemer Planetarium at Retzer Nature Center, S14-W28167 Madison St., Town of Genesee.

Oconomowoc Lions Halloween Parade, 3 p.m. to

5 p.m. Saturday. Parade travels through downtown Oconomowoc. Lions offer free food and drink at Village Green Park. The parade starts at 4 p.m. at Fowler Park and goes through downtown to First Bank. Cash prizes for 1st, 2nd & 3rd places for floats and there be 10 \$20 cash prizes for costumes.

Hogwarts in Hartland, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday, Sunday and Monday, 1100 Lisbon Ave., Hartland. Free event. Nonperishable food items collected for Hartland Food Pantry.

Wisconsin Rummage-O-Rama, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Waukesha County Expo Center, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha. \$4 admission.

WEATHER



Tomorrow:
Sunny
High 58
Low 36

See complete forecast on 8A



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“He tried to turn this into his story, let’s talk about Mr. Brooks and his family and we just kept redirecting it back to the real focus here, is our family, our victims, our community and his responsibility for this destruction.”

— Sue Opper, Waukesha County district attorney



Brian Huber/Freeman Staff

District Attorney Sue Opper is backed by members of the prosecution team, police and family members of those injured in the Waukesha Christmas Parade incident during a press conference at the Waukesha County Courthouse on Wednesday afternoon. She spoke after a jury convicted suspect Darrell Brooks Jr. of all 76 counts against him Wednesday morning following a trial that lasted more than three weeks.

‘JUSTICE WAS SERVED’

Verdict

From Page 1A

Brooks’ trial stretched into a fourth week since beginning Oct. 3 and was viewed in real time by thousands across the nation on a livestream. The trial was marked by repeated clashes between Brooks, representing himself, and Dorow as Brooks argued rulings and objected to testimony, interrupting the judge in the process. Dorow on several occasions removed Brooks to an adjacent courtroom with full audio and video connections, his microphone muted until the judge requested his input.

Mistrial move denied

Before the jury returned its verdicts Wednesday morning, Brooks made a motion for either a mistrial or to have the jury discharged over an internet message that surfaced Tuesday.

That anonymous message, posted as a subreddit on Reddit, purported to come from a juror on the case who believed Dorow was biased against Brooks and said Brooks hasn’t been given proper opportunity to present his case. The report referenced subject matter jurisdiction as well — a question Dorow found to be without merit in a written decision issued during the trial. A posting later Tuesday indicated the message was a prank and apologized for it. Dorow has referred the matter for investigation by the sheriff’s department, and said the parties would be advised of the investigation’s findings.

Brooks said he believed the “alarming” posting only could have come from a juror or someone with intimate knowledge of the case.

But Assistant District Attorney Zach Wittchow said such postings only can be altered by the original author, and given that the apology came after the jury deliberated while cut off from electronics, he said it was all but certain it didn’t come from a juror.

Dorow said the nature of the posting remains “speculative” and thus does not form a factual basis to stop the proceedings.

A measure of justice

After the verdict was read, people affiliated with victims in the case reacted.

“Justice,” Laurie Hogeland of Waukesha said with a sigh of relief. Hogeland said she was friends with three of those who died in the incident — Kulich, Durand and Sparks — and the past year has been a “trying” one.

“Justice was done for them today, even though Darrell has a clear conscience,” she said, referring to a statement Brooks made in his closing argument Tuesday.

“It makes me sick to my stomach [for him to say], ‘It was God’s plan.’ Really? You couldn’t go down Pleasant Street?” That street, intersecting with Main Street, would have led Brooks away from the parade route.

Hogeland said she is taking things day by day, “just trying to help people as much as possible.” But she believed there is no closure to be found. Just as Brooks said during his closing argument he has a child he has never held, Hogeland said her thoughts turn to Jackson’s mother, who never again will hold her son in her arms.

‘A tremendous group to work for’

During a press conference held Wednesday afternoon, District Attorney Sue Opper said she was relieved and satisfied that Brooks will be held accountable. He faces six consecutive life sentences plus 859 years of confinement.

The prosecutors and investigators said they drew inspiration from the people they serve as they investigated and brought the case against Brooks.

“What motivated us was these families that are behind me, a lot of them,” said Opper. “We thought of those mothers and fathers sitting in hospital rooms with their children and the ongoing care they are still physically healing from and certainly still emotionally healing from. That motivated us tremendously. But you couldn’t meet a nicer group of people. I am not surprised, having lived in Waukesha for 35 years, there are good people here. They would ask us, ‘How are you doing? Do you guys need any-



Mike De Sisti, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Family members of victims and supporters hold hands in the gallery as the verdict is read during Darrell Brooks’ trial in Waukesha County Circuit Court on Wednesday.

thing?” That was phenomenal. They are a tremendous group of people to work for and it was our honor to represent them and be a voice for them in court,” she said.

“Once the car went through and everybody had that initial [shock], the way the citizens of this community punched in. There is no other word for it. The nurses, the doctors, the EMTs, the paramedics, anybody who knew anything about how to apply a Band-Aid walked into that street and treated those people. So that was another source of strength for us, right? If they could do that, we can get through this.”

Opper added the prosecution team vowed not to put children on the stand to spare them the trauma of reliving the parade tragedy, when other witnesses and a plethora of video footage were available to tell the story.

Opper said, “We felt very very offended by [Brooks’] behavior, his disrespect of the court, the decorum, the families, his insulting the judge, his challenging the judge. That’s not the way our system was designed. That was intentional on his part. We truly believe that. He did everything he can except claim that the dog ate his homework.”

“He tried to turn this into his

story, let’s talk about Mr. Brooks and his family and we just kept redirecting it back to the real focus here, is our family, our victims, our community and his responsibility for this destruction.”

Opper said she felt the time it took for jurors to reach the verdict was “spot on” given the thoroughness of the investigation. She added that while Brooks has the right to an appeal, she is confident that the record will stand on the decision to let him represent himself at trial.

Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said “justice was served” Wednesday and praised the victims and families for their resiliency. He thanked the investigation team, prosecution team, and the jury “who found this defendant guilty, which is just and right. That defendant’s actions do not define this great community. It refined us in our resolve and our strength in being Waukesha Strong.”

Victims, family members thank police, prosecutors

Victims and family members appearing with Opper, her staff and police at the press conference expressed gratitude to the investigators and prosecutors for their work in bringing Brooks to justice.

Tyler Pudleiner, injured as Brooks drove his mother’s SUV through the Waukesha South Marching Band unit, thanked the authorities, particularly the first responders.

“They are the ones that especially kept me here, gave us a second chance, and they have kept our community strong, Waukesha Strong,” he said. “I am thankful for all their support along the way and getting us to this day. It’s been a difficult day. I know this will give us healing. This is another step forward in this process.”

“We’ve been resilient all the way through. One of the things I’ve said so much throughout this is that we’re stronger than [Brooks] and it’s been proven today.”

David Sorenson said justice was served for his wife, Virginia, and on behalf of his family he thanked all who worked on the case. “We appreciate it,” he said.

Marshall Sorenson, a son of Virginia Sorenson, held a necklace and said, “We’ve been praying for this day a long time. This morning my 5-year-old daughter came up to me and handed me this necklace with my mom’s ashes in it and she told me to take my mom with us to (court). So she was with us today. I just want to thank everyone for what they did today.”

“One last thing, my mom always used to tell us when we were kids in our family that she always said ‘Angels watch over you guys.’ So I just want to say angels watch over you guys and turn on those blue lights tonight.”

Amber Kohnke, mother of a juvenile victim in the incident, also thanked all the parties involved in investigating and prosecuting Brooks and those who supported her family along the way.

“It’s been amazing to see how wonderful this community has been to pull together for all of those who were hurt that night,” she said.

Dorow set a hearing for 1 p.m. Monday to discuss scheduling a sentencing hearing. She asked the parties to provide an idea of how many people would be speaking and how long it may take so they can schedule things accordingly.

‘It was a clean sweep,’ former DA Bucher says of verdict

By Karen Pilarski
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WAUKESHA — The verdict in the trial of Darrell Brooks, Jr., the man accused of killing six people and injuring dozens with an SUV during the Waukesha Christmas Parade, was not surprising to defense attorney and former Waukesha County District Attorney Paul Bucher.

Brooks earlier withdrew his request for an insanity plea and requested to represent himself in court, which was granted. Brooks was found guilty of all the charges Wednesday.

“Based on the evidence and pathetic performance by Brooks, I’m not shocked. I don’t think any-

one would be shocked,” Bucher said. He added if Brooks would have been found not guilty he would have been floored.

“You got to hand it to him. He is one persistent ‘person,’” Bucher said.

Bucher was a bit surprised there was no verbal outburst by Brooks as the verdicts were read.

Prior to the verdict being read, Brooks continued to argue with Judge Jennifer Dorow. He has spent the past month interrupting proceedings and arguing. Bucher said it was standard procedure for Brooks.

“It was a clean sweep by the government and the evidence was there to prove it. Mr. Brooks really helped the government. Not that they

couldn’t do it themselves, they are very competent. Everything Mr. Brooks did helped the government,” Bucher said.

Bucher described it as having two plaintiffs in the courtroom.

The length of the deliberation of jury was short. The jury rested after 8 p.m. Tuesday and started deliberating again at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday. Bucher said the members of the jury probably wanted a break and rest. There is a physiological reaction you can’t control, which is adrenaline, according to the former DA. The jurors spent almost a month listening to Judge Dorow, the prosecution team and Brooks.

“Jurors take their job very seriously. I give them a ton of credit for

that,” he said.

There was an outburst while Dorow was reading the verdicts. A man yelled “Rot in hell, you piece of s***.” Bucher said it was uncalled for and no one should lower themselves like that.

“It’s not surprising if it was a family member. I think that is an indication of the emotions that boil over in these cases. I’m surprised it wasn’t worse. The families were extremely gracious,” he said.

Bucher praised the victim witness team and said they deserve an “attaboy.”

“Jennifer Dunn, director of the Victim Witness Assistance Program, and her team did phenomenal work behind the scenes,” Bucher said.

Next steps

On Monday there will be a conference to discuss sentencing. Bucher is surprised a sentencing date was set on Wednesday.

“I think it is a matter of taking a break and come back,” he said.

He thinks now that the verdict was read, everyone could try starting to go back to their regular lives.

During sentencing, Brooks will have the opportunity to have people speak on his behalf and the victims’ families and victims will be invited to speak.

“That is part of the finale of the judicial procedure to give that statement. I don’t think it is closure,” Bucher said.