

Man accused of killing TSU student in Hadley Park found not guilty

Natalie Neysa Alund , USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee

A man accused of fatally shooting a fellow Tennessee State University student more than two years ago at Hadley Park was acquitted Wednesday.

It took 25 minutes for a Davidson County jury to find 21-year-old Brandon Horton not guilty of reckless homicide in the March 30, 2015, death of 19-year-old Craig Lambert.

Horton had initially been charged with first-degree murder but on Wednesday, during the third day of his trial, Davidson County Criminal Court Judge Seth Norman reduced the charge after Horton's defense attorneys made a motion for a judgment of acquittal.

"Mr. Horton and his family thank the jury for their verdict," said attorney David Raybin, who, along with his son Ben Raybin, represented Horton. "The defense team believed that the Nashville justice system works and an innocent man was saved by a fair legal process."

Witnesses initially told Metro police that Lambert, who was shot in the head, was at a picnic table petting a cat when a pistol he was carrying fell and discharged, police said.

However, autopsy results and other evidence later cast doubt on the witnesses' scenario. A medical examiner testified that due to the way the bullet entered Lambert's head, it was clear someone else pointed the gun at him and pulled the trigger.

Prosecutor Dan Hamm argued Horton was the shooter.

On the night of Lambert's death, he been Hadley Park with five friends and fellow TSU students — three men (Horton, Kylan Vinson and Darren Terrell) and two women (Kennedy Lanier and Brittany Redmond). The group had hatched a plan to rob a drug dealer at the park, testimony showed.

Along with Lambert, Horton and Terrell carried guns with them.

All five witnesses testified that at some point inside a pavilion at the park, they heard Horton's gun drop to the ground and then a gunshot. But none could say which gun fired the shot that fatally wounded their friend.

All five witnesses testified they thought Lambert shot himself.

Horton on the stand, denied shooting his friend. He testified he had taken Xanax due to anxiety about the home invasion and that he was "tweaking" during the shooting.

After he was shot, Terrell laid Lambert down in nearby grass and all three men fled the scene and returned to their dorm, witnesses testified. There, Horton and Terrell hid their guns in a bathroom at the dorm. The weapons were never recovered.

Meanwhile Lanier, who stayed at the park with Redmond, dialed 911 to report Lambert had been shot in a drive-by shooting — a story the group came up with to tell police. Lanier later changed her story to the scenario involving Lambert accidentally shooting himself, as did Vinson.

In the end, the defense argued there was no evidence Horton fired the fatal shot.