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Man gets 15 years in fatal DWI case

Friend died in 2002 crash

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Article Text:

YORK - A Rock Hill man who was driving drunk when his truck filled with stolen bicycles crashed and killed a friend was sentenced to 15 years in prison Friday.

Tavaris Williams, 24, smashed into a tree after eluding police at speeds reaching 95 mph around 3:20 a.m. on Aug. 31, 2002, said prosecutor Willy Thompson. Melvin Jerome McCoy, 39, a passenger in the truck, died after the crash.

Police watched Williams run stop signs and drive on the wrong side of a Rock Hill street, Thompson said. Police tried to pull him over, but Williams sped off and was going so fast on impact near Community Street that the "speedometer stuck at 85," Thompson said. The bicycles were stolen from Winthrop University.

Williams pleaded guilty to felony driving under the influence resulting in death, failure to stop for a blue light resulting in death, reckless homicide, possession of stolen goods and driving without a license.

Hospital records - turned over Friday by Piedmont Medical Center on a judge's order - showed Williams had a blood-alcohol level of .225, Thompson said. People with blood alcohol levels of .08 or higher can be considered legally intoxicated in South Carolina.

Williams, who suffered a broken pelvis and other injuries, apologized to McCoy's family and his own family. "I didn't mean to hurt anybody," he said. Williams could have faced 25 years for the DUI alone, plus more time for the other charges. The only plea bargain prosecutors offered was recommending the sentences run concurrently.

"There were other criminal activities going on, then he chose not to stop for police," Thompson said.

Judge Howard King did make the sentences concurrent, saying he took into account the stolen bicycles and that both Williams and McCoy had been drinking.

"You made very, very bad choices, Mr. Williams," King said.

Williams had "a severe alcohol addiction problem," said his lawyer, York County Chief Public Defender Harry Dest, and both Williams and McCoy were "extremely intoxicated."

McCoy's blood-alcohol level was .245, Thompson said.

Williams and McCoy were friends, Williams' father Dwayne Walton said in court, and McCoy had been driving earlier that night. "It could have been the other way around," Walton said.

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