

PROVIDENCE Journal

Jury acquits Providence man of assaulting city police officers

Friday

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A Superior Court jury on Friday acquitted a Joshua Robinson, 25, of Providence of assaulting two city police officers and resisting arrest in an encounter that left him bloodied, with a gash to his forehead.

By _____
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PROVIDENCE — A Superior Court jury on Friday acquitted a 25-year-old city man of assaulting two Providence police officers and resisting arrest in an encounter in March 2013 that left him bloodied, with a gash to his forehead.

The jury of six men and six women found Joshua Robinson not guilty of two simple assault counts and one of resisting arrest after deliberating about three-and-a-half hours.

The verdict elated a crowd of about 25 supporters, who were convinced of Robinson's innocence and that he had been charged only to cover up a brutal beating by Sgt. David Allen. They wept, embraced and yelled out in celebration.

Robinson, who stands 4 feet 11 inches, as compared to the officers' 6 feet, declined comment afterward, but cried and hugged his lawyer, Dawn Huntley, as the verdict was read.

Huntley said her client had been vindicated after previously being convicted of the crimes in a District Court bench trial. He appealed the conviction by Judge Elaine T. Bucci to Superior Court, where his two-week trial was overseen by Judge William E. Carnes Jr.

“I think it erodes the public trust when you have a department who insulates under the code of silence. Any officer who’s done wrong, they have a duty to ferret them out,” Huntley said. “The community needs to know that they are also protected from the Police Department.”

She said she hoped the verdict would bring about change in the department and the community.

Allen testified that Robinson resisted arrest after running a stop sign around 2:30 a.m. on March 5, 2013, and that he saw him stuff bags of crack cocaine in his mouth. No drugs were found at the scene.

Terrence Jones, a self-described civil rights investigator and former Philadelphia police officer, said he planned to hold the Providence police officers who testified during the trial accountable for their lies and “perjury.”

“Stop covering up police. It comes from the top down,” said Jones, who investigated the case at the request of Huntley and her co-counsel, Carl Ricci.

Providence Police Chief Hugh Clements said, “We respect the criminal justice process, and we certainly respect the jury.” He declined to comment further.

The case caught the attention of civil-rights advocates, dozens of whom observed closing arguments Thursday, because of photos of Robinson’s bruised, bloodied and swollen face after the incident. Robinson was taken to Rhode Island Hospital for treatment of the injuries, which required stitches and included two black eyes.

Several onlookers, who did not identify themselves, lashed out angrily after the verdict, taking aim at closing statements by Special Assistant Attorney General Joseph McBurney, who prosecuted with John Perrotta.

McBurney disputed any notion of a cover-up by police and argued that Robinson's resistance brought on the violent struggle. He asserted that Robinson had probably swallowed the drugs.

Robinson, meanwhile, has filed a civil suit in U.S. District Court, accusing Allen and Officers Christopher Zioli, Mark Hubbard, Sean Lafferty, Matthew McGloin, Matthew Rampone, Jerome Lynch, Clifford Torres and Joseph Donnelly of using excessive force, assault, battery, false arrest and engaging in malicious prosecution.

He alleges that the department's civilian complaint procedures perpetuate a climate of misconduct by failing to properly investigate allegations and discipline officers. He is seeking unspecified damages.

—updated 7:28 p.m.