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PLAYER'S BROTHER FOUND INNOCENT ROBERTS ACQUITTED IN SHOOTING DEATH

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A Richland County jury found John Wayne Roberts not guilty Thursday of murder and assault charges in a shooting free-for-all in a Lower Richland neighborhood.

Roberts walked out of the courthouse a free man in the case, which attracted more than usual attention because of the recruiting of his basketball star brother by the University of South Carolina.

The 20-year-old Roberts reacted to the verdicts by shaking hands with his attorney, **Jack Swerling**. He then hugged family members, including brother Stanley Roberts, the senior star of Lower Richland High School's state championship basketball team. "I'm happy as hell. I was really scared," John Wayne Roberts said. "Now I can get this behind me and get on with the rest of my life."

The jury of seven blacks and five whites took two hours to reach verdicts in the case, which took four days to try. Roberts faced an automatic life sentence if he had been convicted of murder.

He was charged with killing Gerald Rowe, 18, and shooting Rowe's brother, Anthony, 21, and Ricky Edmonds on April 21. Roberts and four friends from the Hopkins area had confronted the Rowes and their gang, the "B-Loves," in what may have been a battle over turf.

Roberts testified during the trial that he did not go to the Bluff Estates neighborhood looking for trouble. He said he was threatened and someone handed him a pistol that he fired in panic.

Stanley Roberts, who was not at the shooting, became embroiled in a controversy last fall when it was disclosed that Eastover Magistrate Harold Hill contacted the Roberts family in an effort to recruit the 7-foot center for the University of South Carolina. Hill had conducted the preliminary hearing on the murder and assault charges against John Wayne Roberts.

Stanley Roberts was one of the most highly recruited high school basketball players in the nation before committing to Louisiana State University.

"The position I was in -- I didn't want it in any way to affect Stanley," John Wayne Roberts said. He said he plans to return to college and hopes to play basketball on a scholarship. He attended junior college for a year.

Stanley Roberts agreed that the charges against his brother had distracted and worried him.

"But it's all behind me now," he said. "I can go out and do the best I can. I'm very happy for my brother."

Jim Childers, coach of the Lower Richland basketball team, said the controversy had adversely affected his team's morale. He said the decision Thursday should help the school's effort to win another state championship. The team is ranked second in the state this week.

"It (the verdicts) definitely has been good for my morale," said Childers, who testified as a character witness for John Wayne Roberts.

Swerling said Stanley Roberts was unfairly dragged into the controversy.



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