

The Sun

Columbia man's killer asks judges to reduce sentence; Inmate hoping for 'mercy' wants 10 of 35 years dropped from prison term

by Erika Niedowski SUN STAFF

March 26, 1999 Page(s): 3C

Edition: HOWARD

Section: LOCAL

Length: 444 words

Index Terms:

HOWARD REGION

Record Number: 9903260107

A 23-year-old who was convicted of fatally shooting a Columbia man in 1996 asked a three-judge panel in Howard County Circuit Court yesterday for a 10-year reduction in his sentence.

Willie Marquez Hampton is serving the second year of a 35-year sentence at Eastern Correctional Institute for the Dec. 21, 1996, killing of Sean Wilson, 25, after a fight at a neighborhood center in Columbia's Hickory Ridge village.

Shackled at the ankles and wearing baggy blue jeans and an oversized gray shirt, Hampton stood before Judges James B. Dudley, Diane O. Leasure and Dennis M. Sweeney and asked for "mercy" during a 30-minute hearing at the Ellicott City courthouse.

"I'm not saying that I'm innocent or a goody-two-shoes," said Hampton. "I'm willing to do the time for the crime, [but] can I just get some type of mercy shown on my behalf?"

Fatal argument

The judges have 30 days to issue a written opinion. They can reduce the sentence, increase it or leave it as it is.

On the night of the shooting, Wilson went to the Hawthorn Neighborhood Center -- where about 100 people had gathered for a party -- to pick up a friend, according to court documents. After he and Hampton got into an argument, Hampton pulled a gun and shot him in the chest.

To avoid a trial, Hampton pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and possession of a handgun in the commission of a felony.

Judge Lenore R. Gelfman sentenced him to 35 years, the cap under the plea agreement.

Violent nature denied

Hampton's lawyer, Samuel Truette, of the county Public Defender's Office, said Hampton should not be considered a career criminal, and that a sentence of 25 years would be more appropriate.

"Certainly I'm not minimizing what he did," said Truette. "Mr. Hampton isn't minimizing what he did. The question is: To what degree should he be punished?"

Truette said Hampton had three prior convictions, two for drug violations and one for theft, but no juvenile record or pattern of violent behavior.

Other than the shooting, Truette said, "he has never shown a malignant and dangerous approach to other individuals."

Assistant State's Attorney Sue-Ellen Hantman, who prosecuted the case, argued against the sentence reduction, saying that Hampton will be eligible for parole in 17 years.

"I think [the sentence] was appropriate, and it remains appropriate today," she said.

Copyright 1999 The Baltimore Sun Company