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Twin receives life sentence in Altamonte attack



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One twin gets life for killing old robber in Altamonte Springs. Other twin awaiting trial.

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A twin who shot and killed a man in broad daylight near a bustling Altamonte Springs road was sentenced to life in prison on Wednesday while his brother awaits his own first-degree murder trial in the coming months.

After deliberating for almost two hours, a Seminole County jury convicted 21-year-old Manuel Rodriguez Jr. of first-degree murder and fleeing from police.

Circuit Court Judge Marlene Alva gave Rodriguez life in prison — the mandatory sentence for using a gun in a premeditated killing.

Prosecutors initially sought the death penalty against the fraternal twins involved in the Jan. 20, 2014 shooting at State Road 436, less than a half mile west of Interstate 4.

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But as the facts revealed themselves, it would have been difficult convincing a jury to send the young men, Jehovah's Witnesses with no violent criminal history, to death row, said Assistant State Attorney Domenick Leo, who prosecuted the case.

The brothers decided to kill 22-year-old Tevin Demetrius Davis, but it wasn't an intricate plan crafted days in advance, criteria needed to support the death penalty, Leo said.

The Rodriguez twins were driving a gold Chevy Cobalt when they spotted Davis walking with a friend along the Altamonte Springs road, a commercial stretch less than two miles west of the Altamonte Mall.

They recognized Davis, who had previously robbed Manuel, and made a U-turn to catch up with him.

Christopher Rodriguez got out of the car and said "This is what you get" while Manuel Rodriguez remained in the driver's seat, Leo said.

"The way it went down ...they were driving down the street and saw that guy walking on the other side of the street," Leo said. "It was a happenstance meeting."

The trial, which started with jury selection on Monday, centered on whether prosecutors could show Manuel Rodriguez, along with his brother, shot Davis.

Video surveillance and eyewitnesses couldn't place the gun in Manuel's hand.

But a jailhouse snitch did.

He told the jury Manuel Rodriguez admitted to shooting Davis.

The snitch, Jacarious Cotton, wasn't offered a deal in the case, according to Leo.

He came forward because Christopher said Cotton should get life in prison for his crime — child abuse, according to Leo.

Shell casings and bullets found in Davis' body also connected Manuel Rodriguez to the crime.

Witnesses saw Christopher shooting a revolver after jumping out of the car. Four guns were found in the car with Rodriguez.

There's a surveillance video but it's difficult to tell who is doing what in the grainy images.

Rodriguez's court-appointed attorney, Frank Bankowitz, said he is appealing the verdict but would not elaborate.

The trial for Christopher Rodriguez is set to begin in January, according to Leo.

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