

In plea deal, gay couple's killer gets life

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network
Thursday, February 27, 2003 / 04:39 PM

James Tyler Williams has agreed to a plea bargain in the July 1999 killing of a Northern California gay couple that will likely keep him in prison for the rest of his life, according to newspaper reports.

Williams, 32, and his older brother Matthew, who committed suicide last November, were also responsible for setting fire to three Sacramento-area synagogues and for fire-bombing an abortion clinic.

Williams is expected to plead guilty in a Shasta County, Calif., court on Friday to killing Winfield Mowder, 40, and Gary Matson, 50, in a rural area outside of Redding.

The couple, who were well-known in the Redding area for their civic activism, were shot to death late at night while sleeping.

Details of the plea bargain will be made public on Friday, but some family members of the gay couple have already expressed their disappointment.

"I am not happy with it," said Gary Matson's younger brother, Brian. "I certainly wanted Tyler to get the death penalty."

He added, however, that his family is satisfied Tyler will most likely be locked up the rest of his life. Prosecutors said that a plea bargain was only possible with the consent of the victims' families.

The suicide late last year of Matthew Williams opened the door for prosecutors to pursue a plea bargain with the withdrawn and shy Tyler, who legal experts said might be difficult to win a death verdict against.

Ringleader Matthew basked in media attention surrounding his trials. In a November 1999 interview with the Sacramento Bee, he admitted to killing Matson and Mowder, saying he did it because God viewed homosexuality as a sin.

Ironically, Matthew later told a friend that he was gay and was tormented by the realization.

Under Tyler Williams' plea bargain there is a possibility, albeit remote, that he could get paroled as an elderly man.

"I'm relieved that it's over," Brian Matson told the Bee. "I'm disappointed

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that in the absence of a death penalty he didn't get a clear life sentence without the possibility of parole.

"It's an insult that he's going to go on living and breathing and reading books and dreaming," Matson said. "Whereas he stole that from Gary and Winfield. And he's polluted the minds of all of the rest of us who have been so hurt by this."

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First gay, lesbian sports conference held

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network
Monday, March 31, 2003 / 05:10 PM

The first national conference on gay and lesbian sports was held last weekend in Boston.

The conference, the National Gay & Lesbian Athletics Conference, and its sponsoring organization, the Gay & Lesbian Athletics Foundation, are tackling one of society's last remaining bastions of homophobia -- sports.

More than 300 athletes, coaches, sports administrators and fans from across the United States and a handful of foreign countries, including Canada, France and England, took part in the three-day event.

Retired Canadian swimmer Mark Tewksbury, an Olympic gold medal winner and world record holder, said the conference exceeded his expectations many times over.

"There is no doubt in my mind that we have set the stage for a breakthrough in how lesbian and gay athletes are treated by their teammates, coaches and fans," he said. "My greatest hope is sometime in the not-too-distant future a person's sexual orientation won't matter, just how well they perform."

Holly Metcalf, gold medal winner in rowing at the 1984 Olympics, who was making her first remarks before a GLBT audience, said that the conference had energized her to do more for the cause of gay and lesbian athletes.

"The conference will shake up the sports world, and not just in the LGBT community," said Mac Chinsomboon, executive director of GLAF. "The impact on mainstream sports will be felt as stories are written by the media who were at the conference, including ESPN, 'HBO Real Sports' and Sports Illustrated, and by many others who have requested photos and transcripts."

Conference speakers included several Olympic medal winners, reporters from the Los Angeles Times and ESPN, former major league baseball player Billy Bean and former major league umpire Dave Pallone, author of the autobiography, "Behind the Mask."

Boston Mayor Tom Menino kicked off the weekend at a City Hall press conference and reception. Menino believes that sports fans are ready for a

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major professional team sports player to come out. "I know Boston fans would be supportive," he said.

Addressing the same issue, Dan Woog, journalist and author of numerous books on gay athletes, said the first openly gay professional team player was more likely to come from the ranks of current high school or college athletes.

"Someone playing in the major leagues today has too much to lose," Woog said. "On the other hand, someone in high school or college who is out and a star athlete, someone who has proven they can perform with the best, would make it to the majors based on his performance."

Panel discussions ranged from the portrayal of the gay athletes in the media to GLBT athletes in high school and collegiate sports to legal protections for GLBT athletes to corporate sponsorship for them. In addition, the Women's Sports Foundation had a workshop on its groundbreaking "Project to Eliminate Homophobia in Sports."

For most conference participants, the fact that it happened at all was enough.

"It was great to see that there are so many people working on the same issue," said Pat Griffin, author of "Strong Women, Deep Closets" and professor at the University of Massachusetts. "We will now be able to take our work to another level. It's just a matter of time before homophobia in sports is eliminated."

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Transgender group decries Jay Leno, NBC

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network
Wednesday, April 2, 2003 / 04:48 PM

Jay Leno's "Tonight Show" monologue on Monday, in which he joked about a male-to-female transsexual, has drawn the ire of the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition.

The organization's executive director, Vanessa Edwards Foster, issued a statement on Tuesday criticizing the host of the top-rated late night show for "prime time dehumanizing of transsexuals."

Leno, one of the country's best-known television stars, noted in his monologue at the start of the show that a transsexual was recently honored as Woman of the Year in California Assembly District 13 (San Francisco).

Leno said that the California Assembly "awarded a man who had a sex change as its Woman of the Year. When 'he' accepted the award, 'he' said there was a part of 'him' that didn't want to accept it ? but that's gone now."

"In a country where no positive accomplishments of transgender people are ever reported it's curious that belittling humor of these same people is openly welcomed," said Foster. "Leno's remarks took an historic recognition for a transgender community leader and summarily diminished it with insensitive humor."

On March 24, the California Assembly honored Theresa Sparks, the first transgender recipient of the chamber's Woman of the Year award.

"We're a community that's afforded few heroes, and little hope," Foster continued. "Destroying the positive impact our community makes, simply for the purpose of gratuitous laughter, serves to objectify transgender people and crush their hope."

Foster acknowledged that Leno does not write all of his material. "But he does have the final decision regarding what he uses," she said. "Leno obviously felt it was okay to belittle transsexuals."

NTAC's criticism was also aimed at "Tonight Show" broadcaster NBC, which is the parent company of cable station MSNBC, home to [Michael Savage's new talk show](#). In its statement, NTAC described the conservative Savage as "blatantly homophobic and hateful of transgender people."

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The "Tonight Show" controversy comes just months after the murder of California transgender teen [Gwen Araujo](#). The 17-year old was beaten and bludgeoned at a party by four men last October. Her killers, who at one point ordered her off the couch she was being brutalized on because it was being stained with blood, buried her in a shallow grave and then had breakfast. None of the partygoers alerted authorities.

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Education chief's remarks cause furor

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network
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Education Secretary Roderick Paige's attempt to clarify his views on religion and schools may not satisfy the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and other education and civil rights organizations calling on him to recant his recent comments on the subject.

In an interview published on Monday with the Baptist Press, the news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, Paige said: "All things equal, I would prefer to have a child in a school that has a strong appreciation for the values of the Christian community, where a child is taught to have a strong faith."

Paige added: "The reason that Christian schools and Christian universities are growing is a result of a strong value system. In a religious environment the value is set. That is not the case in a public school, where there are so many different kids with different kinds of values."

As secretary of education, Paige oversees a public school system with approximately 47 million students, according to the Associated Press.

"The language of religious values -- particularly 'Christian values' -- has often been misused to isolate or denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," said Kevin Jennings, GLSEN's executive director.

"For Secretary Paige to suggest that the tenets of any particular religion have place in public education is an exceedingly dangerous breach of the constitutional separation of church and state, and of tremendous concern for safe schools advocates who seek to protect LGBT students and staff from harassment, violence and discrimination in schools," Jennings added.

Bob Chase, past president of the National Education Association and a member of GLSEN's board of directors, echoed Jennings' comments. "As the nation's highest education official, (Paige) must learn to see diversity as an incredible rich resource for thought and ideas."

Responding to the firestorm of controversy his comments sparked, Paige told reporters at a hastily called news conference on Wednesday that his personal views had no bearing on his role as the nation's education chief.

"I understand completely and respect the separation of church and state,"

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