

Jury gives Dallas officer probation for Sam's Club robbery

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Alph Coleman was a Dallas police officer who betrayed his badge and the public trust when he masterminded the robbery of a Sam's Club.

But on Wednesday, the same jury that found the 32-year-old guilty of aggravated robbery slapped him on the wrist and let him go free — on probation.

Jurors also fined Coleman \$10,000.

Coleman, fired long ago and convicted Tuesday, was working an off-duty security job for the store when he tried to rob the store in 2008. No one was hurt in the robbery and no money was taken from the Red Bird-area store. Two others are still facing charges.

Jurors left without commenting on their decision to give Coleman 10 years' probation.

Coleman had faced up to life in prison. His attorneys Tom D'Amore, Bill Wirskye and Chris Knox, asked for probation.

"The community will be no safer if he is in prison," Wirskye told jurors. "Probation is punishment."

Wirskye added that Coleman has already been punished because he will always be known as a bad cop and a felon.

"He will carry that with him like a scarlet letter," Wirskye said.

Public integrity unit prosecutors Frank Able and James Bagnall had argued that Coleman, who played minor league baseball, deserved a life sentence.

"One of the cornerstones of any police department is trust, public trust," Bagnall told jurors. "What happens when that police officer not only orchestrates but participates fully in an armed robbery? ... He violated the public trust."

Able told jurors that Coleman and his two co-defendants "victimized" the terrified Sam's employees and Dallas police.

Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins filed into the courtroom to hear the verdict but left immediately after State District Judge Don Adams read the jury's decision.

Coleman, who was taken into custody Tuesday after he was found guilty, had to speak with probation officers and return to the Dallas County Jail before he is released.

Able asked Adams to give Coleman up to 180 days in jail as a condition of probation. Adams said he will consider it.

The officer's father, also named Alph Coleman, had tears in his eyes after the verdict.

"God is good" he said when leaving the courtroom.

D'Amore said outside the courtroom that while he believes Coleman was not guilty, "we're satisfied that the end result means Alph Coleman goes home."

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