

Beat: Sports

Pistorius not mentally ill during girlfriend's killing, court hears

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USPA News - A panel of mental health experts has determined that South African Paralympic athlete Oscar Pistorius did not suffer from a mental defect when he shot and killed his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day last year, the court heard on Monday. Court proceedings in the high-profile case were brought to a halt last month when the double-amputee Olympian was ordered by Judge Thokozile Masipa to undergo a 30-day mental health evaluation to determine whether Pistorius was criminally responsible for the shooting of his model girlfriend.

Pistorius spent the past 30 days as an outpatient with a panel that consisted of three psychiatrists and one psychologist at the Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital, one of the country's top mental institutions, in Pretoria. Their findings were made public on Monday, when the trial resumed. "Mr. Pistorius did not suffer from a mental defect or mental illness at the time of the commission of the offense that would have rendered him criminally not responsible for the offenses charged," said state prosecutor Gerrie Nel, reading from the psychiatric report. "Mr. Pistorius was capable of appreciating the wrongfulness of his act and of acting in accordance with an appreciation of the wrongfulness of his act." Nel informed the court that the panel appointed by Judge Masipa had provided the necessary reports and their findings revealed that, at the time of the offense, Pistorius did not suffer from a mental defect that would have impacted his ability to determine between right and wrong. Neither the prosecution nor the defense challenged the report's findings. The mental evaluation was ordered by Judge Thokozile Masipa after Dr. Merry Vorster, a forensics psychiatrist used by the defense team, said her evidence suggested that Pistorius is hyper-vigilant and had been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Dr. Vorster said Pistorius had a "long history" of the disorder. The judge determined that Dr. Vorster's evidence had "not been contradicted nor can it be in the absence of other psychiatric evidence," and thus ordered a proper investigation to be carried out. Pistorius is facing trial at the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria on charges of premeditated murder and reckless use of a firearm in public in connection with the shooting death of his girlfriend, 29-year-old Reeva Steenkamp, on Valentine's Day 2013. The famed athlete denies the charges, insisting the fatal shooting of his girlfriend was accidental. During a court hearing after the shooting, Pistorius claimed he had shot Steenkamp after confusing her with an intruder he believed was inside the house, but prosecutors have accused the athlete of deliberately killing his girlfriend. On February 22, 2013, Pistorius was freed on bail set at an estimated \$100,000. At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, Pistorius participated as the first double-leg amputee to ever compete in the Olympics. He took part in the men's 400m and 4X400m relay races.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com