

Willowick man escapes 18-year prison sentence

■ Jury finds suspect guilty of misdemeanor

By Tracey Read
News-Herald Staff Writer

The fact that Punsak Watchakorn's wife was chronically unfaithful during their 15-year marriage may have convinced a Lake County jury to forgive him for trying to get revenge on his wife and her latest lover.

Watchakorn, 35, of East 327th Street in Willowick, was accused of going into a homicidal rage after seeing his wife on a motorcycle with a Painesville man June 30 at Cleveland Metroparks' North Chagrin Reservation.

On that day, Watchakorn twice rammed his van into a motorcycle ridden by Sherri Pongtorn-watchakorn and Gregory Krashoc at the Willoughby Hills park while the married couple's 5-year-old daughter was in the van.

But his attorney, Joseph Klammer, successfully argued the

whole thing was a horrible accident.

Watchakorn was on trial before visiting Judge Robert E. Feighan for attempted murder and felonious assault. If convicted of both felonies, he faced up to 18 years in prison. Instead, a jury found Watchakorn guilty only of misdemeanor assault.

"We're very pleased with the verdict," Klammer said. "I think the jury made the absolute, correct decision in that they found he had no intent to harm either his wife or the other man."

Assistant Lake County Prosecutor Mark Bartolotta disagreed.

"I'm disappointed," he said. "I think the jury probably let their sympathy of what Mr. Watchakorn had to put up with all these years cloud their assessment of the facts."

Sherri, whose last name is longer than her husband's because he shortened his for business reasons, admitted sleeping with at least four other men during their marriage.

Sherri also testified that she

believes the incident was an accident because Punsak never hit or threatened her when he found out about her other affairs.

Bartolotta tried to prove that this latest affair was the final straw, and that Punsak finally snapped when his suspicions about the latest boyfriend were confirmed.

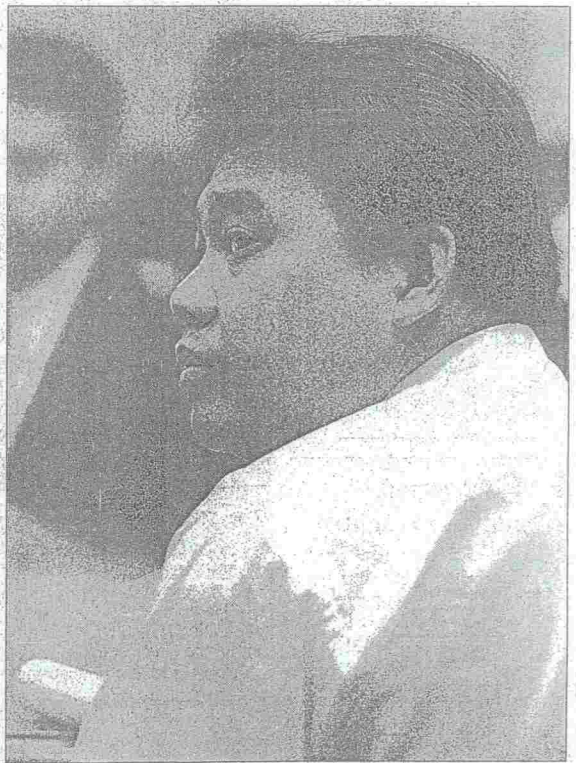
The prosecutor pointed out that Watchakorn hit Krashoc's motorcycle not once, but twice. The second collision sent Sherri and Krashoc flying about 500 feet in the air, Bartolotta said.

But a jury didn't buy that the incident was anything more than an accident.

Meanwhile, the couple is trying to work through their differences.

"At this point, they're still married and (Watchakorn's) very thankful to have the opportunity to address any marital issues," Klammer said.

Watchakorn, who is free on bond, is scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 12. The maximum penalty for misdemeanor assault is six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.



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Accused: Defendant Punsak Watchakorn watches jury selection proceedings Tuesday in Lake County Common Pleas Court. He was found guilty of misdemeanor assault after being accused of trying to run over his wife and her friend as they rode on a motorcycle.