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Flagler gang murder case set for jury

By FRANK FERNANDEZ, Staff writer

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BUNNELL -- A jury is expected to begin deliberating the fate of a man accused of leading the Flagler Bloods gang today after prosecutors presented testimony he was responsible for a deadly home invasion in Palm Coast and other crimes.

The prosecution rested its case on Tuesday against Brandon Washington, 24, who is accused of racketeering, second-degree felony murder and other charges. The defense also rested its case without calling any witnesses.

Circuit Judge Raul Zambrano is expected to give the case today to the jury of four women and five men, which includes three alternates.

The second-degree felony murder charge stems from the death of gang associate Rashawn Pugh, 20, who was killed by the intended victim, Sean Christopher Adams, during an attempted home invasion by the group in 2007 in Palm Coast.

Washington's trial is the first prosecution of a gang member under racketeering charges in northeast Florida, said case agent Jason Jolicoeur with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which along with the Flagler County Sheriff's Office investigated the gang.

Prosecutors Jason Lewis and Jennifer Dunton said Washington was "O.G." or original ganster of the Flagler Bloods, meaning he led the gang. He could face up to life in prison if convicted.

On Tuesday, the jury watched video testimony of Washington's former fiancée Meghan Smith, who said Washington was in charge of the gang and ordered the home invasion. On the video, Lewis asked her about another crime, the robbery of a sub shop in Palm Coast on March 15, 2008.

Washington needed money to pay a debt to a bondsman or bail would be revoked. So Washington came up with a plan for three female Bloods members to rob the sub shop, where one of them worked.

"Would it be fair to say that Brandon Washington was the planner and organizer of the robbery," Prosecutor Jason Lewis asked.

"Yes," Smith replied.

The plan called for gang members Mercedes Owens, 24, and Rhonda Larkins, 28, to rob the Sub Base near Palm Coast Parkway and Old Kings Road. Another gang member, Kim Burgos, 22, worked at the shop and

was in on the robbery. Larkins gave Burgos a note scrawled on a dollar bill demanding money. Larkins got the cash and jumped into a car driven by Owens. But other employees at the sub shop called authorities.

And Owens sped from the shopping center so quickly and erratically that she caught the eye of off-duty Flagler County sheriff's deputy Kevin Byrne, who testified he was driving by and stopped her. While Byrne was checking out Owens' driver's license, his radio crackled with word of the robbery and a description of the car. The two were arrested and so was Burgos.

Under cross examination by defense attorney Fernando Iglesias, Burgos testified that Washington had been listening to others plan the robbery and it had not been his idea. Burgos also said that Washington had told her not to commit the robbery but she insisted on doing it.

However, Michael D'Angelo Gilbert, 25, who was second in command of the gang, testified earlier that Washington came up with the idea for the robbery, which like other crimes the gang referred to as work or a mission.

"He had told the females that they had to put in some work, go on a mission," Gilbert testified.

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