

San Antonio Express-News  
Metro / South Texas Page 3B  
Man cuts deal in murder case  
He pleads guilty to manslaughter in girlfriend's death.

Ihosvani Rodriguez EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Publication Date : June 20, 2003

Prosecutors unexpectedly dismissed murder charges Thursday against a man who insisted he accidentally shot and killed his girlfriend last year.

In exchange, Sean Woodard, 29, pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter, owning up to the fact that his recklessness caused the death of his live-in girlfriend, Andrea Rodriguez, 19.

The last-minute plea deal came after three days of testimony in front of a jury and one day after defense attorney Pat Hancock grilled police investigators over a statement they claimed Woodard made.

Two San Antonio police detectives acknowledged Woodard cried and seemed remorseful while insisting that the July 28, 2002, shooting was an accident.

However, Hancock pointed out that none of that information was in the written statement the officers prepared based on Woodard's words.

Because nobody else witnessed what transpired inside the car where the shooting occurred, the jury would've had to rely heavily on the statement.

A weapons expert also testified it was possible that a bullet was left in the chamber of the gun Woodard believed was empty.

Rodriguez was shot and killed inside a car as the couple rode home from a party. Her 3-year-old daughter was struck in the shoulder by the same bullet but was not seriously injured.

Instead of facing a possible life sentence, Woodard will face two to 20 years in jail.

On Thursday, the jury was kept out of the courtroom while attorneys worked out an agreement.

Woodard later made his guilty plea before District Judge Sharon MacRae, who is expected to decide the sentence next month.

In his statement to police, Woodard claimed he was arguing with Rodriguez as the two traveled home. Woodard said he pulled out a gun, pulled the safety, and pointed it at his girlfriend.

The gun then fired, striking Rodriguez in the chest and then hitting the toddler.

Assistant District Attorney Chris DeMartino acknowledged Woodard's true intentions would have been a crucial issue that the jury could've gone either way in deciding. However, he would not say at what point he believed the state's case began to unravel.

Rodriguez's family members seemed upset after the plea agreement and left the courtroom without

comment.

Defense attorneys Hancock and David Christian said the manslaughter charges were appropriate.

"Sean has been grieving for a long time for the woman he truly loved and who died in tragedy," Hancock said. "He has taken responsibility for that, and that's all a human being can do. He will be punished for the act that really happened."

irodrig@express-news.net