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Erie Times-News (PA)

JURY ACQUITS ERIE MAN IN SHOOTING

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BYLINE: JOHN GUERRIERO

A jury acquitted an Erie area man Thursday of attempted homicide and assault charges in the shooting of two other men in downtown Erie. The panel in Erie County Court decided that Charlton Jennings, 20, 4900 block of King Arthur Court, was not guilty of felony attempted homicide, two felony counts of aggravated assault, two misdemeanor counts of recklessly endangering another person and one charge of carrying a firearm without a license, another misdemeanor.

Jennings had been accused of shooting Brian Dennis twice in the back with a .25-caliber semi-automatic handgun and James Gottschling once in the left hip, according to court records. The shooting occurred about 1:15 a.m. on Sept. 17, 1995, in an alley in the first block of W. 5th Street, court records state.

Both shooting victims have recovered from their injuries, attorneys said.

Defense attorney William Weichler said his client denied committing the shooting. Jennings acknowledged being present at the time, but said he didn't have a gun, Weichler said.

"His story remained entirely consistent," Weichler said. Jennings testified in his own defense.

Jennings stopped at the alley to see if he knew anyone in a group of people who were "hanging out" after a high school football game, according to Weichler.

After the two victims left a nearby tavern, they came upon the group in the alley, according to testimony. A verbal argument led to a fistfight before gunshots were fired.

"The commonwealth's case was based on accusations made by people who were probably responsible for the shooting," Weichler claimed.

The prosecution theorized that Jennings drove his car to the alley to hang out with some friends, then he became angry when his car wouldn't start. After the fight broke out, the prosecution alleged he pulled a gun from the trunk and fired two to three shots in the air.

As everyone scattered, the prosecution alleged, he fired the bullets at the two victims.

Assistant district attorney Patrick Carey said three people first

told police they weren't present when the shooting occurred, but later gave police written statements claiming that Jennings was the shooter.

The witnesses changed their story again at the defendant's preliminary hearing, saying they only accused Jennings because they thought he was blaming them for the crime, according to Carey.

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