

Judge gives Manes 6 years

By Howard Pankratz and Kevin Simpson
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Nov. 13 - GOLDEN - For selling the semiautomatic handgun Dylan Klebold used to kill four people and wound two others at Columbine High School, Mark Manes was sentenced Friday to six years in prison. The 22-year-old former Columbine student also was sentenced to three years, to be served simultaneously, for possessing an illegally sawed-off shotgun during target practice with Klebold and Eric Harris. The six-year term was for selling a handgun to minors.

In a hearing that riveted the courtroom with tearful testimony from victims' relatives and the cold-hearted words of the killers themselves, Manes' attorney pleaded for probation.

But Jefferson County District Court Judge Henry Nieto said selling the TEC-DC9 assault pistol sent a "tidal wave" of horror over the community. The sentence needed to deliver a message.

Manes, led from the packed courtroom in handcuffs, will be eligible for parole in 2 1/2 to three years. He could have received 18 years.

"We believe justice was done," prosecutor Steve Jensen said.

Not all of the victims' families agreed.

"He's directly responsible for 13 murders," said Bruce Beck, stepfather of Lauren Townsend, one of 10 students killed in the school library on April 20. "No way was justice served. Every one of these families has all these memories of their kids, or husband. But that's all we have. (Manes' family) gets their kid back."

During victim testimony, Beck told the court Manes should get at least 13 years so he could spend one year contemplating the life of each of the Columbine victims.

"That gun killed four people, and gave them the guts to kill 13," he said. Almost two dozen others were wounded.

FROM THE TAPES

Before Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 13 people and then themselves, they made several videotapes, possibly hoping the tapes would launch them to cult-hero status.

Kate Battan, the lead Jefferson County sheriff's investigator on the Columbine case, read a one-minute transcript from one of the tapes in court Friday. Here are excerpts: Klebold: "I'd like to make a thank you to Mark and Phil. Thank you."

Harris: "Yeah, you know it's not their fault. I mean they have no f----- clue."

Klebold: "They had no clue, like people who use a horse to carry s---."

Harris: "Don't arrest any of our friends, co-workers or family members. Don't arrest anyone. They didn't have a f----- clue and that's that."

The "Phil" that Klebold mentioned is Philip Duran, who introduced the killers to Mark Manes at a gun show. Duran has been charged with the same counts Manes pleaded guilty to.

In addition to thanking Manes and Duran, Klebold thanked "Mr. Savage," apparently a reference to the maker of the pump-action shotgun they used.

Sue Petrone, whose 15-year-old son, Daniel Rohrbough, was killed, said she felt empty after hearing the sentence.

"This was a no-win situation," she said. "It's just a bad thing. I'm not jumping for joy by any means. But it was in the range of what we expected."

For some of the victims' families, the most difficult part was listening to defense arguments that cast Manes as a young man who overcame a troubled childhood - including drug use - to become a man of good character.

"Having that attorney talk about how wonderful Mark Manes is, that was tough," said Coni Sanders, daughter of slain teacher Dave Sanders. "But the truth prevailed in the end. He wasn't misunderstood - he was in the wrong."

Manes, a computer-systems administrator who surrendered to authorities in May and had pleaded guilty, told the courtroom full of victims' families he was deeply sorry.

"When I found out, I was horrified," he said. "I had no idea anything was going to happen.

"I told my parents I never want to see a gun for the rest of my life. There is no way I can adequately explain my sorrow to the families of the victims of Columbine. It is something I will regret for the rest of my life," Manes said.

After Manes was escorted away, the families broke into applause.

Manes' attorney, Robert Ransome, said later that although Manes appeared calm "he was shaken, really shaken".

But Ransome also said his client will be OK.

"If Mark's character is as I believe it to be, he will turn it into a positive in the long run. He's extremely intelligent and has developed an excellent attitude about life."

Earlier, prosecutor Jensen and Kate Battan, the sheriff's investigator leading the Columbine investigation, painted a stark picture of the carnage caused by the TECDC9, one of four guns Klebold and Harris used in the massacre.

Klebold fired the TEC-DC9 55 times, killing four and wounding two, Battan said. Klebold also used it to kill himself.

Harris fired a pump-action shotgun, using it to kill four and wound seven, Battan said. Manes had fired that same gun four times on a March 6 target-shooting outing with Harris and Klebold in the Douglas County foothills.

Battan also read a transcript from a videotape Harris and Klebold had made. The two killers thanked Manes and Phil Duran for providing them with ammunition and the TEC-DC9. They also said Manes and Duran had no idea what the gun would be used for.

Duran, 22, worked at Blackjack Pizza with Harris and Klebold and allegedly introduced them to Manes at a Jan. 23 gun show. Manes later sold Harris and Klebold the TEC-DC9 for \$500. He also gave them two ammunition clips.

Harris and Klebold were 17 at the time.

The night before the massacre, Manes bought 100 rounds of 9mm ammunition for Harris and sold it to him for \$25.

Manes went target shooting with Harris and Klebold three times before April 20, Jensen said. Manes knew the two were "unstable" but never told anyone. Jensen said Harris and Klebold said alarming things during the target practice: "Imagine if that was someone's f----- brain." One time, Harris and Klebold fired so many rounds their two sawed-off shotguns that their hands began to bleed.

In all, nine victim witnesses representing seven families testified before the sentencing.

Their words, and the professional-quality music videos that memorialized the lives of victims Matt Kechter and Lauren Townsend, brought tears to many onlookers and sent the court reporter scrambling for boxes of tissues to pass through the courtroom.

Many lives changed

"I have to deal with the loss of my grandson and the pain you caused my daughter and her family," said Bill Gansemer, maternal grandfather of Daniel Rohrbough. "Look around you, and you'll see the many lives you have changed. I hope you think of your actions every day for the rest of your life." While victims' family members testified, Manes hung his head at the defense table. He watched the two videos attentively as they flashed through the lives of Townsend and Kechter with still photos and old video footage.

"Our joy for life has been diminished forever," said Ann Kechter, Matt's mother. "Our hearts will never heal."