

Gun provider sentenced to 6 years in Columbine case

Victims' families applaud

November 13, 1999

Correspondent Tony Clark and Reuters contributed

GOLDEN, Colorado (CNN) -- The 22-year-old man who provided one of the guns fired by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in the Columbine High School massacre was sentenced Friday to six years in prison.

Jefferson County Judge Henry Nieto said Mark Manes "had a history of ignoring rules of law" and should serve a tough sentence because "the harm caused by this is almost too hard to comprehend."

"I fear that the habit of ignoring rules of law came into play here," Nieto said.

Manes received six years in prison for selling a weapon to a minor and three years for possessing a sawed-off shotgun. The sentences will run concurrently.

He could have received a maximum 18 years behind bars.

Manes' mother broke down in tears when he was handcuffed and escorted out of court. But family members of the victims applauded.

'Justice was served'

Harris and Klebold killed 12 Columbine classmates and a teacher before taking their own lives.

The court was packed Friday with about 60 relatives of victims either killed or injured in the shooting spree. Some called the sentencing a victory for justice.

"It was a relief. Justice was served, but it doesn't help the pain," said Coni Sanders, whose father, Dave Sanders, was the teacher killed in the attack. "It was an emotional day, and the truth prevailed in the end."

Ten people, mostly relatives of those killed, gave impact statements, urging Nieto to send Manes to prison for the maximum 18 years as a message that gun sales to minors will not be tolerated.

Kristen Townsend, sister of shooting victim Lauren Townsend, told Nieto that, "Thirteen beautiful lives have been taken tragically and unfairly.

"Did Mark Manes shoot and kill my sister? No. ... But he sold the weapons and he must be punished for it," she said.

Klebold committed suicide with gun

The judge issued his decision after prosecutors read from transcripts of videotapes made by the high school gunmen, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, thanking Manes for his help in obtaining a TEC-DC9 semiautomatic weapon.

That gun was used by Klebold during the shooting spree to kill four people and injure two others, Kate Battan, an investigator with the Jefferson County sheriff's office, told the court.

She also said the videotapes showed Harris and Klebold using the handgun to shoot up a tree during targeting practice. "Imagine that in someone's (expletive) brain," one of the boys said.

Sanders told reporters, "It was hard to listen to that, because my father was shot in the head."

Battan said both Harris and Klebold thanked Manes for helping them get the gun that was later used in their rampage.

But both teens said Manes and Phillip Duran, who is also charged with providing a gun to a minor, had no idea about their plans to conduct one of the nation's deadliest acts of school violence, Battan said.

"We used them. They had no clue," Klebold was quoted as saying, referring to Manes and Duran.

Later in the tapes, both teens said if Manes had not gotten them the gun, they would have gotten it from someone else.

Battan said Klebold used the gun to commit suicide at the end of the rampage, while Harris used a shotgun.

Defense: Manes deserved leniency

Defense attorney Robert Ransome had argued that Manes deserved a lenient sentence.

"What Mark did, he intended no harm," he said. "It was not what was put into Harris' and Klebold's hands ... it was what was put into their heads."

Manes told the court he was "horrified" when he first learned of the attack.

"I had no idea anything was going to happen," he said. "I am truly sorry."

But Deputy District Attorney Steve Jensen said Manes had been arrested nine times as a youth for various infractions -- including throwing rocks, drug dealing and making threats and called the defendant a "bully and a thug."

Manes pleaded guilty in August to felony counts of providing a juvenile with a handgun and possession of an illegal weapon -- a sawed-off shotgun.

A videotape at a shooting range showed Manes firing that shotgun -- the same one used in the school attack to kill four and injure seven.

Manes went to targeting practice with Harris and Klebold on at least three occasions. The night before the Columbine massacre, he bought them ammunition.