

Manes seeks reduced jail term

By Howard Pankratz

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Feb. 9, 2001 - The man who sold the Columbine killers one of their guns is asking for a reduction of his six-year prison term.

Mark Manes, 23, sold the two teenagers a TEC-DC9 semiautomatic handgun for \$500 about three months before the massacre. Manes pleaded guilty in August 1999 to providing a handgun to minors.

"Justice was not done," lawyers Robert Ransome and Phil Cherner wrote in a motion for reconsideration. "Fairness, reason, and logic were ignored - an opportunity to start a nation's healing process by demonstrating compassion and understanding was passed over."

While Ransome said Manes has become the scapegoat for killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, parents of two children killed at Columbine said they oppose a sentence reduction. "I would be real disappointed in the system if they allowed that to happen," said Beth Nimmo, whose daughter, Rachel Scott, died outside the school. "I think the six years were fair. Thirteen lives were lost. And he contributed to that."

Tom Mauser, whose son, Daniel, was killed in the school library, said the six-year sentence was appropriate. "It was certainly less than it could have been," he said. In an unusual request to the Colorado Court of Appeals, Manes' lawyers are asking that the case be sent directly back to Jefferson County District Judge Thomas Woodford. If Woodford gives Manes "any relief whatsoever" on the sentence imposed in November 1999 by then-District Judge Henry Nieto, Manes will drop his case in the appeals court, Ransome said.

Ransome said an appeals-court decision could come any day.

Manes, a computer technician, is serving his sentence at the Sterling Correctional Facility. At the request of the prison chaplain, Manes is helping the facility establish some sort of database for the prison, court papers say.

"I think the sentence was too heavy, too harsh, taking all things into account," Ransome said.

The lawyers say Nieto, now an appeals-court justice, ignored recommendations from judicial-system professionals who suggested a non-prison sentence. Jefferson County prosecutors are opposing the sentence reduction, saying the defense lawyers significantly downplay Manes' role. The TEC-DC9 he sold the two gunmen was fired by Klebold 55 times during the April 1999 shootings, killing four and wounding two. In a written response to the defense motion, prosecutor Steven Jensen said Manes did more than just sell a gun.

He also provided two ammunition clips - a standard 12-round clip and an extended 30-round clip - and a carrying strap, said Jensen. Jensen also charged that Manes "guaranteed the ammo clips would be fully loaded" by purchasing 100 rounds of 9mm ammunition and selling it to Eric Harris for \$25 the night before the massacre.

The prosecution also argues that in addition to arming Harris and Klebold, Manes provided instruction and training to the killers on how to shoot the handgun. He showed Klebold how to use the gun when he sold it to him. Then on three separate occasions, he went with Klebold and Harris into the foothills southwest of Littleton where they practiced with the semiautomatic handgun and with other weapons.

Manes also pleaded guilty to possessing an illegally sawed-off shotgun during the target practice.