

Paper: The Kansas City Star
Title: Man accused in 1993 murder acquitted Co-defendant's testimony not adequate, defense argued.
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A Jackson County jury acquitted a man Wednesday of murdering a Kansas City man three years ago. Jurors found Michael L. Rolf, 25, not guilty of robbing and killing Joseph Okorie on May 24, 1993.

The key evidence against Rolf was a co-defendant who got a deal, and the defense argued that evidence was not enough.

Two men and a woman robbed Okorie after he and his wife pulled into their driveway at 3111 Elmwood Ave. Okorie refused to give the one-armed man his wallet and ran into his house. The gunman chased him inside and shot him to death in the dark house.

Diana Thompson, a co-defendant, testified that she, Michael Sanders and Rolf did the robbery.

Defense lawyer John Picerno told jurors in closing to remember the deal Thompson got for her testimony - a 10-year sentence.

``He's guilty of associating with Diana Thompson,'' Picerno said.

``Guilty of a poor choice in friends. '' He contended that Rolf was not there that night and that Thompson accused him to win a deal for herself and cover up for the real robber.

The only other evidence came from the victim's wife. Sonya Okorie identified Rolf in a first trial this year that ended in a mistrial.

Okorie told police it was too dark to see the killer, but when she saw Rolf at the first trial, she identified him.

``It was like seeing a ghost,'' she testified at both trials.

Assistant Jackson County Prosecutor Bryan Krantz argued in closing that Thompson, ``with all her faults,'' told the truth about what happened that night.

Her testimony did convict her other co-defendant at trial last year. Michael Sanders is serving a 30-year sentence for murder, robbery and two counts of armed criminal action.