

15 years-to-life term awaits prostitute's convicted killer

By ANDY FURILLO
afurillo@sacbee.com

A defense lawyer's argument that there are "no rules" in the sex business was rejected Wednesday by a Sacramento jury that convicted his client of second-degree murder in the strangulation slaying of a prostitute.

Robert Ray Hon, 33, will face a 15 years-to-life term when he is sentenced March 27 by Sacramento Superior Court Judge Maryann G. Gilliard.

The jury found him guilty in the Jan. 30, 2003, slaying of Vicki Jo Harris in the back of his van in North Highlands. A dispute over his refusal to pay her more money - while insisting she continue her work after he failed to complete a sex act - set off the death struggle that took her life, according to

trial testimony.

Hon testified in his own behalf that during the fight, Harris grabbed him by his genitals and bit his finger. He said he then subdued her by placing his forearm across her throat.

Defense lawyer Donald Masuda argued to the jury last week that it was a killing in the heat of passion that should have resulted in a manslaughter verdict, not murder.

"When a person is with a prostitute, there are no rules," Masuda argued. "You're talking about a girl who is out there to make money. What happens here is: Is it five minutes or 10 minutes? Who cares? Who cares what the dispute is over? And when somebody's got hold of your genitals and bit your finger, you better believe he is going to do something."

Deputy District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert strongly disputed Masuda's assertion about prostitution's rules.

"Did she lose her right to say 'No'?" Schubert asked the jury. "She had made it clear to him that she was done."

Schubert also disputed Hon's testimony that he held his arm against Harris' neck for only about 30 seconds.

She said Harris' injuries were more consistent with two or three minutes of continuous pressure applied in the act of strangulation.

Harris never provoked Hon, according to the prosecutor's argument. The defendant made up the story "to make (his actions) look a little more reasonable when she said, 'I'm done,'" Schubert said.

The prosecutor reminded the jury of Hon's quips to his

friends after the killing, when he drove around North Highlands with Harris' dead body in the back of his van.

"I have a woman in my car whose batteries have run out," he told one friend.

Then there was his statement to sheriff's detectives when they found him hiding underneath a truck near the location of the body and they asked him if he was cold.

"Not as cold as her," Hon said, referring to Harris.

Wednesday's verdict came in the retrial of the case that first went to jury in 2005. The jury in the initial trial acquitted Hon of first-degree murder but could not reach a verdict on whether it was a second-degree homicide.

Call The Bee's Andy Furrillo, (916) 321-1141.