

Jurors to resume deliberation in Thompson case; They will decide whether Michael Goodwin ordered the 1988 slaying of a former partner and his wife as a result of a bitter dispute.

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Michael Goodwin, brash creator of the motor sport of supercross and a relentless self-promoter, was certainly a “jerk,” his lawyer conceded recently.

He was also an “egomaniac.” A “braggart,” too, she said.

But the question, which jurors return to this week, is not Goodwin’s character but whether he killed his former partner, racing legend Mickey Thompson, and Thompson’s wife, Trudy.

As jurors resume deliberations after a holiday break, they will do so without some of the most intriguing evidence the defense and prosecution tried to present about the slayings.

The judge excluded as irrelevant, confusing or prejudicial the sighting of a long-haired blond man near the scene of the killings and possible links to the earlier slaying of Thompson’s nephew.

Prosecutors also dropped a witness who had testified that Goodwin bragged about getting away with murder.

In March 1988, Thompson and his wife were fatally shot in the driveway of their Bradbury home by two men who fled on bicycles and were neither caught nor identified. No physical evidence from the crime scene implicated Goodwin in the killings, and no direct evidence was presented that he hired the killers or planned the ambush.

A parade of witnesses testified that they had overheard Goodwin repeatedly threaten Thompson, a former business partner turned hated rival who had bankrupted Goodwin with a successful lawsuit.

Deputy Public Defender Elena Saris argued that the circumstantial nature of the case opened the door to other theories in the slaying. Early in the Thompson investigation, one of hundreds of tips Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department investigators received concerned Joey Hunter, who had distinctive long, blond hair, according to court records.

Several witnesses said they had seen Hunter hitchhiking with

a bicycle not far from the crime scene, within an hour of the slayings, according to court records.

A relative said Hunter had confessed to her, the records said, and he flunked three polygraph tests. But Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Teri Schwartz ruled that because investigators never made a case against him, Hunter’s story was irrelevant.

Saris protested.

“You’re taking a case that is purely circumstantial and telling the jurors they can only hear one circumstance,” Saris said at a court hearing.

But her argument failed. Schwartz said the potential for wasted time, confusion and jury prejudice was too great.

“To say that the people’s case is weak doesn’t mean the defense gets to put on anything the defense thinks,” Schwartz said during the hearing.

Deputy Dist. Atty. Alan Jackson won the Joey Hunter round but lost the Gail Hunter go-round (no relation). Gail Hunter, Goodwin’s onetime girlfriend, testified at a preliminary hearing that Goodwin had played her a videotape of one of the 10 television treatments of the case and told her he got away with the killings because he was smarter than police.

But when the trial began, she went from star witness to non-witness. The defense won access to Hunter’s medical records, which showed her to be “a psychiatric patient with a substance-abuse problem,” according to court records, and Jackson did not call her to testify.

But perhaps the most intense evidentiary battle centered on a defense theory that the man who earlier killed Thompson’s nephew had masterminded the racer’s death.

Scott Campbell was killed and his body was thrown from an airplane in 1982 in what police alleged was a drug-related killing. Thompson testified against Campbell’s alleged killer, Larry Cowell, whose first conviction was overturned on appeal. While Cowell was awaiting retrial, he arranged for the subsequent killings in order to block Thompson from testifying again, the defense argued in court papers.

Saris identified two hit men who had been convicted of other contract killings within six months of the Thompson slayings, according to court papers. Jackson, the prosecutor, in a court

hearing called the Cowell theory “wild speculation.” The judge agreed.

The defense also wanted to tell the jury about alleged meddling by Thompson’s politically connected sister. Collene Campbell, the former mayor of San Juan Capistrano and Scott Campbell’s mother, fervently believes Goodwin made good on repeated threats to kill her brother. She hired a private investigator and offered a \$1-million reward.

The defense contended she used her political influence to get the Orange County prosecutor to file murder charges against Goodwin five years ago, court papers said. An appeals court threw out the Orange County case, ruling in 2004 that the charges were based on “guesswork, speculation and conjecture.”

The passage of time has made it difficult to find relevant new evidence in the Thompson slayings. Witnesses’ memories of the events are nearly two decades old. How sound the jurors consider the recollections to be could be the key to the deliberations.

The only person who said she saw the killing, Allison Triarsi, then 14, testified she had a clear view from her nearby window of a gunman shooting Trudy Thompson in the head while her husband looked on. The testimony was key to proving Goodwin’s alleged motive, vengeance.

Now a television news anchor in Minneapolis, Triarsi bristled when asked in court last month if her memory had faded. “I think as I get older I recall better and better what happened,” she said.

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