

18-year-old sentenced to prison in hit-and-run crash that left 2 dead

By Nicholas Erickson
Jsonline.com | July 18, 2015

The defense team of 18-year-old Michael Hobbs told a judge Friday that as he matures, he will better understand the consequences of stealing a Chevy Tahoe and causing a hit-and-run crash that left two dead. The experience, the lawyers said, will certainly change his behavior over time.

The judge, Stephanie Rothstein, agreed but said the best place for Hobbs to learn those lessons is behind bars.

"You need a long time to arrive at these conclusions because your conduct was so dangerous and showed utter disregard for human life," Rothstein said during Hobbs' sentencing hearing Friday in Milwaukee County Circuit Court.

She sentenced Hobbs to 30 years in prison for a February crash that killed 74-year-old Bernard Hanson and 64-year-old Mary Hanson, a married couple who were a block away from their home on Milwaukee's southwest side. In the moments before the crash, Hobbs blew past a stop sign and reached speeds of almost 80 mph in a residential neighborhood near S. 84th St. and W. Wilbur Ave.

On impact, both vehicles slid into a third. The Hansons died on impact while a passenger in the other car suffered minor injuries. Hobbs then fled on foot.

Rothstein dismissed the defense argument of youth and said no matter how old a person is, stealing a car and driving at that speed is against the law.

"All of these things are pretty common sense," Rothstein said.

Hobbs was caught by police later the night of the crash in the 3300 block of W. National Ave. Six passengers who had been in the stolen Tahoe with him also were arrested.

The 30-year sentence imposed by Rothstein included the maximum 15 years for a felony charge of hit-and-run causing death and an additional 15 years for two counts of second-degree homicide.

Rothstein said that while Hobbs had a fairly supportive family, the long sentence was warranted due to his history of breaking the law and stealing vehicles with groups of teens.

The fatal crash occurred less than a week after a warrant was issued for Hobbs' arrest for stealing a van. He was on probation for stealing a truck in August.

Hobbs, linked to a gang called the Cut Throat Mob, did not have a driver's license.

"We're talking about a person who shouldn't have been on the road," Assistant District Attorney Antoni Apollo said.

The sentencing came amid the city's recent carjacking binge over the past week.

During the hearing, Brian Forecki, the owner of the Chevy Tahoe that was stolen three days before the fatal crash, called Hobbs rotten, selfish and a coward.

"He belonged in prison when it happened," Forecki said.

Hobbs admitted being high on marijuana at the time of the crash, and he dropped out of high school after completing his sophomore year. He had little employment history.

After he is released from prison, Hobbs must serve 20 years of extended supervision.

During the first 10 years, Rothstein ordered him to spend at least 20 hours annually talking to high school students about his experience in an effort to decrease reckless teen driving.

Apollo said he hopes a lengthy prison stay will send a strong message to the community that reckless driving, no matter the driver's age, will not be tolerated.

"If you shouldn't be driving... there is going to be a penalty, and it should be substantial," he said.