

LOCAL

More than 20 years later, woman's killer sentenced

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More than 20 years after the murder, Jackie Kuntz now feels some sense of closure after the person she believes is the real killer of her daughter was convicted Wednesday in the 1994 death of Jacie Taylor.

Douglas Thames, 43 — who was already serving a sentence for the rape and strangulation death of a Fort Collins woman — was found guilty on charges of first-degree murder, felony murder and first-degree sexual assault in Taylor's death by a Mesa County jury Wednesday.

Thames immediately was sentenced to a term of life in prison without the possibility of parole, plus 48 consecutive years in prison.

Mesa County District Judge Richard Gurley said the evidence in the case indicated a "brutal, brutal killing of this young woman" and he said a lesser sentence would be "an insult to the jury's findings."

Thames was charged in Taylor's death in 2012 after DNA evidence pointed to him, prosecutors said, but he is the second man convicted of Taylor's murder.

Robert "Rider" Dewey was the first man convicted in the case, and he spent 18 years in prison before it was determined he was wrongfully convicted. Dewey was later exonerated by the DNA that became crucial to the Thames prosecution.

"To go through this again was hell," Kuntz said about the two trials, at Thames' sentencing Wednesday.

To Thames, she said: "I think you are a very small man to make Mr. Dewey stay in prison for 18 years and I will pray for you." Thames chose not to speak at his hearing or testify during trial.

Dewey did not testify during the trial that started at the beginning of November.

Kuntz said to a reporter after the hearing that "my heart broke for (Robert Dewey) and his family."

"This is closure for him, too, I hope," she said of Dewey. "I truly believe in the justice system."

Thames is serving a life prison term, which had the possibility of parole, for the 1989 murder of Susan Doll in Fort Collins. Thames' new sentence is consecutive to his current sentence, meaning he is no longer eligible for parole.

Doll's murder shared similarities with Taylor's murder, said Mesa County Assistant District Attorney Richard Tuttle, who also prosecuted Dewey for Taylor's murder.

"This is justice delayed, not justice denied," he said.

Tuttle said he was "as responsible as anyone" for the first, wrongful conviction of Dewey.

Taylor was found strangled with a dog leash in her bathtub on June 4, 1994, at 885 Inness Court, now Iowa Avenue, in Palisade.

Thames was not on law enforcement's radar at the time, but he lived near the apartment where Taylor was murdered, investigators later determined.

Thames' semen was found on a blanket in Taylor's apartment and his DNA was a contributor to samples that were located under Taylor's broken fingernails, on soap that had been inserted into her body, and on the leash used to strangle her, according to a check of an offender database in 2011 by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.



DOUGLAS THAMES