

MEMORANDUM DECISION

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IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF INDIANA

Lasean Watkins,
Appellant-Defendant,

v.

State of Indiana,
Appellee-Plaintiff

December 14, 2023
Court of Appeals Case No.
23A-CR-1109

Appeal from the
Marion Superior Court

The Honorable
Sheila A. Carlisle, Judge

The Honorable
Marc T. Rothenberg, Judge

Trial Court Cause No.
49D29-2002-MR-6797

Memorandum Decision by Judge Vaidik
Judges Tavitias and Foley concur.

Vaidik, Judge.

Case Summary

- [1] Three defendants were tried together and convicted for a February 2020 quadruple murder in Indianapolis. This is the appeal of one of those defendants, Lasean Watkins. Watkins contends the evidence is insufficient to establish that he was involved. We affirm.

Facts and Procedural History

- [2] The evidence most favorable to the verdicts is as follows. In February 2020, nineteen-year-old Jalen Roberts and twenty-year-old Marcel Wills lived at Carriage House East Apartments at 42nd Street and Mitthoeffer Road on the east side of Indianapolis. Marcel owned guns (including a Draco AK-47) and sold marijuana. On the night of February 5, twenty-one-year-old Braxton Ford and twenty-one-year-old Kimari Hunt, who was Marcel's girlfriend, were hanging out with Jalen and Marcel at the apartment.
- [3] That same night, Watkins, who was nineteen years old, called his friend, nineteen-year-old Rodreice Anderson, and asked for a ride. When Rodreice arrived at Watkins's house, brothers Cameron and Desmond Banks were with Watkins. Cameron was nineteen years old, and Desmond was sixteen. The three got into Rodreice's gold Oldsmobile, and Watkins told Rodreice to drive them to Jalen and Marcel's apartment so they could buy marijuana.

- [4] Meanwhile, Anton Wilson and his brother Mikalus Hervey pulled up at Jalen and Marcel’s apartment around 9:30 p.m. Anton went inside while Mikalus stayed in the car.
- [5] Shortly before 10 p.m., Rodreice, Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond pulled up at the apartment. Rodreice stayed in his car while the other three went inside. Anton was already inside when Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond entered. Anton didn’t know them but later identified them in a photo lineup as Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond. *See* Tr. Vol. III pp. 124-127; Tr. Vol. V pp. 91-94; Exs. 27-29. Anton noticed that Watkins had a rose tattoo on his hand and a gun at his waist. Anton also noticed that Watkins was acting “jittery” and pacing around. Tr. Vol. III p. 110. Marcel asked Watkins why he was acting that way, but Watkins didn’t respond. Marcel also asked Watkins if he wanted him to buy back the gun he had sold him, and Watkins responded that it would cost more because he had modified it. The situation made Anton feel “uncomfortable,” so he told Marcel that he was leaving and would see him later. *Id.* at 112.
- [6] According to surveillance footage, Anton walked out of the apartment at 10 p.m. When Anton got back to his car, he saw that Watkins had also exited the apartment and walked over to Rodreice, who was still sitting in his car. Watkins asked Rodreice if he had change for a \$20, and Rodreice said no. According to Rodreice, Watkins told him that there were “four people in the house” and he was “about to rob them.” Tr. Vol. IV p. 226. Rodreice stayed in his car.

- [7] According to surveillance footage, Anton’s car pulled away as Watkins reentered the apartment. *Id.* at 135. Shortly thereafter, Rodreice heard gunshots and moved his car in the parking lot so that it was closer to the street. About five minutes later, Cameron got into the car shortly followed by Desmond and Watkins. Each carried a gun and duffel bag. Rodreice drove them to Cameron and Desmond’s house, and Cameron gave Rodreice a jar of marijuana.
- [8] Around this time, 911 calls about shots fired started coming in. Officers from the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department responded to the apartment and found the bodies of Jalen, Marcel, Braxton, and Kimari inside. Jalen had been shot twenty-nine times, Marcel and Braxton had been shot seven times each, and Kimari had been shot five times. It looked like the apartment had been “ransacked,” and Marcel’s guns were missing. *Id.* at 121.
- [9] The State charged Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond each with four counts of murder, four counts of felony murder, and four counts of Level 2 felony robbery. The State also charged Rodreice with four counts of felony murder and four counts of Level 2 felony robbery. Rodreice and the State entered into a plea agreement, under which Rodreice would plead guilty to the four counts of Level 2 felony robbery and the State would dismiss the four counts of felony murder. Rodreice, who also agreed to testify against Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond, was sentenced to thirty-five years, with five years suspended to probation.

[10] A five-day jury trial was held in February and March 2023. Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond were tried together. Anton and Rodreice testified as detailed above. A firearms expert testified that three different guns were used in the shootings. Evidence was admitted that a few hours after the shootings, a message was sent from Watkins’s Facebook account containing the names “Jalen Roberts” and “Antonio Banks,” which is the Facebook profile name for Marcel. Tr. Vol. V pp. 143-44; Ex. 437. In addition, on February 11, messages were sent from Watkins’s Facebook account attempting to sell a “Draco” gun. Tr. Vol. V p. 145; Ex. 437.

[11] The jury found Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond guilty as charged. As to Watkins, the trial court entered judgment of conviction for the four murder counts, vacated the four felony-murder counts, and entered judgment of conviction for four counts of robbery as a Level 5 felony, which were reduced from a Level 2 felony due to double-jeopardy concerns. Tr. Vol. VII pp. 38-39. The court sentenced Watkins to sixty years for each murder conviction, to be served consecutively, and four years for each robbery conviction, to be served concurrently, for an aggregate sentence of 240 years.

[12] Watkins now appeals.

Discussion and Decision

[13] Watkins contends the evidence is insufficient to establish his “identity as one of the individuals who committed the murders or robberies.” Appellant’s Br. p. 17.

When reviewing sufficiency-of-the-evidence claims, we neither reweigh the evidence nor judge the credibility of witnesses. *Willis v. State*, 27 N.E.3d 1065, 1066 (Ind. 2015). We will only consider the evidence supporting the verdict and any reasonable inferences that can be drawn from the evidence. *Id.* A conviction will be affirmed if there is substantial evidence of probative value to support each element of the offense such that a reasonable trier of fact could have found the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. *Id.*

[14] The State acknowledges the case against Watkins was circumstantial. “In a circumstantial case, no single piece of evidence in isolation—no ‘smoking gun’—is offered to persuade the jury to convict.” *Young v. State*, 198 N.E.3d 1172, 1176 (Ind. 2022). “Yet a jury may be convinced, beyond a reasonable doubt, by looking at a web of facts in which no single strand may be dispositive.” *Id.* (quotation omitted). “Indeed, the evidence in the aggregate may point to guilt where individual elements of the State’s case might not.” *Id.* (quotation omitted).

[15] The web of facts here was sufficient to convince the jury beyond a reasonable doubt that Watkins committed the murders and robberies. We first note that Watkins acknowledges the evidence places him “at the scene at or around the time of the shooting.” Appellant’s Br. p. 15. Indeed, Anton identified Watkins (who had a gun at his waist), Cameron, and Desmond as the three men who entered the apartment right before he left and 911 calls for shots fired started coming in. Rodreice’s testimony then connected the strands into a web. That is, Rodreice testified that he picked up Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond and

drove them to the apartment to buy marijuana. After Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond entered the apartment, Watkins exited and told Rodreice there were four people inside and he was going to rob them. Watkins reentered the apartment, following which Rodreice heard gunshots. Watkins, Cameron, and Desmond then exited the apartment, each of them carrying a duffel bag and gun. The victims were shot forty-seven times by three different guns. After the shootings, messages were sent from Watkins's Facebook account referencing Marcel and Jalen and offering to sell a Draco gun, the same type of gun that was missing from Marcel's collection.

[16] Watkins makes other arguments, such as that neither his DNA nor his fingerprints were found on any firearms or bullets and that other people could have committed the crimes, such as Anton and his brother. These arguments, however, are merely requests for us to reweigh the evidence. The evidence is sufficient to support Watkins's convictions for murder and robbery.

[17] Affirmed.

Tavitas, J., and Foley, J., concur.