

The Charlotte Observer

Man relieved by not-guilty verdict



Mackins
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convicted

By GARY L. WRIGHT
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For three months, Larry Mackins feared he might spend the rest of his life in prison.

The 43-year-old Charlotte bail bondsman was under federal indictment and knew the government's reputation for obtaining convictions and hefty sentences.

"I hadn't done anything," Mackins said. "But I figured my odds were 99 to 1 that I'd get convicted."

"When you see 'U.S. versus Larry Mackins' on all those court

papers, it's like the world is against you. The federal government has got all the assets to find you guilty. And I'm a black man. What chance have I got?"

Mackins, who has a wife and two daughters, isn't going to prison.

A federal jury in Asheville acquitted him last month on drug-distribution and money-laundering charges.

Mackins' two brothers, who were also in the bail-bond business in Charlotte, weren't so lucky. They

were convicted.

In July, a federal grand jury indicted Mackins and his brothers, accusing them of conspiring with drug dealers to distribute cocaine, heroin and marijuana over the past 16 years.

The three brothers also were accused of laundering money through several schemes, including setting up an investment company and wiring the money through

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Man voices relief about not-guilty verdict

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Western Union.

Alonzo Mackins Jr., 47, and Willie Jerome Mackins, 45, as well as another co-defendant, Ivey Walker, 44, of Charlotte, were convicted. A fifth defendant, Leo Simon of California, was acquitted.

The Mackins brothers and Walker will be sentenced in three or four months. They each face a maximum punishment of up to life imprisonment.

Charlotte defense attorney Noell Tin, one of Larry Mackins' lawyers, said there was plenty of evidence to exonerate his client.

"He wasn't guilty," Tin said. "Larry has made some mistakes in his life. But he was not involved with anyone to sell drugs and launder money."

Tin said the defense presented witnesses during the two-week

trial that showed that Mackins had been estranged from his brothers for years and had not associated with them.

Tin said the defense showed jurors that Mackins didn't need to sell drugs to make money. An accountant testified that Larry Mackins had a net worth of \$1.9 million — assets he acquired from his bail-bond business and inherited from his father, Tin said.

"Larry is one of the hardest workers around," Tin said. "He works seven days a week and he works 18 hours a day."

Mackins confirmed that he'd had a falling-out with his brothers over their bail-bond business. He said he set up his own business — G-L Mackins Bonding Co. — and has had no business association with his brothers since 1994.

Even so, Larry Mackins worries about his brothers and their

families.

"I feel bad my brothers got convicted," he said. "Willie is married and has four kids. Alonzo has two boys and a girl he has to leave. These kids need a father."

U.S. Attorney Mark Calloway wasn't making excuses for the two acquittals.

"The jury has spoken. We accept the jury's verdict," Calloway said. "It is as equally important for the government to accept a jury's verdict when it loses a case as when it wins one. That's the way the system is supposed to work."

Mackins, meanwhile, admitted that he'd made mistakes. "I'm not squeaky-clean. I was using drugs — cocaine and marijuana."

He believes his drug use and the money he'd acquired over the years attracted the attention of federal prosecutors.

"The wealth I accumulated made me look like a drug dealer,"

he said.

Mackins remembers the depression he felt while spending 2½ weeks in jail after his arrest. "That was the lowest point in my life."

Mackins said he doesn't harbor any hard feelings toward the federal government. "God says to forgive the ones who do you wrong."

And he's got a new appreciation for the justice system. "I'm proud to say the jury system does its job. Those people on the jury worked hard and came up with the perfect verdict for me."

Mackins can now return his attention to running his bail-bond business.

"I'm relieved to get this huge burden off my back," he said. "I'm not a drug dealer. That was proven."

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