

Murder trial begins, again, for Gardiner man accused of shooting former friend, nearly cutting off the hands of another

The murder trial of Dylan Ketcham, 23, began, for the second time, on Wednesday at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta. His first trial was declared a mistrial in September.

BY [KEITH EDWARDS](#)KENNEBEC JOURNAL



Dylan Ketcham, left, and defense lawyer Stephen Smith listen Wednesday to opening arguments by state prosecutors in the murder and attempted murder trial of Ketcham at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta. The Gardiner man is accused of attacking two former friends, shooting and killing one and nearly severing the wrists of the other with a machete during a 2020 altercation in Gardiner. *Andy Molloy/Kennebec Journal*

AUGUSTA — Dylan Ketcham shot his former friend, Jordan Johnson, in the head with a handgun, killing him. Then he brutally attacked another former friend, Caleb Trudeau, with a machete, striking him repeatedly in the head, neck, armpit and both arms and almost killing him, too, a state prosecutor said as the second murder trial of Ketcham got underway Wednesday.

The violent incident in January 2020 left Trudeau's hands nearly severed from his wrists and resulted in potentially lifelong injuries.

But defense lawyers argued this week at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta that Ketcham of Gardiner was scared of the pair and had good reasons to arm himself before the confrontation. One of the men had recently threatened to beat Ketcham with a baseball bat, and arranged to meet Ketcham that night so the pair could attack and rob him, according to lawyer Ian L'Heureux. Ketcham felt he needed to be able to defend himself, according to L'Heureux.

Wednesday marked the second start to a trial of the 23-year-old Ketcham on murder, attempted murder and aggravated assault charges, after a [judge declared the first trial a mistrial](#) in September.

Superior Court Justice Michaela Murphy made the ruling after determining that gruesome body camera footage from Gardiner police officers as they arrived at the crime scene had disturbed some jurors. The jurors had not been asked during the selection process whether viewing such videos would impact their ability to be impartial, prompting concerns that the trial would be unfair.

A new jury — eight men and eight women — was selected earlier this week. This time, Murphy did not allow some of the previous video footage to be shown in court to avoid repeating the procedural error.

State prosecutors said Wednesday that Johnson and Trudeau had no idea Ketcham had armed himself when they went to meet him in the early-morning hours of Jan. 25, 2020, in a neighborhood near Quimby Field in Gardiner. They were both unarmed.

“Jordan Johnson was killed at the age of 22,” prosecutor Meg Elam, an assistant state attorney general, told jurors in her opening statement at the Capital Judicial Center. “He was a son. A brother. Flawed as he was, he was a human being. And Caleb Trudeau, at the time not yet 25, lost the full function of his hands.”

The prosecutor said Johnson “had [tragically lost his parents](#) not long before (and) has struggled to regain some use of his hands so he can be what he wants to be for his son. And all because of the defendant.”

Elam said when jurors consider the evidence in this case and apply the law, there will be no reasonable doubt in their minds that Ketcham committed the crimes of which he is accused.

L’Heureux countered that Ketcham had armed himself because he was scared after the two other young men threatened him — online and in person — because they apparently felt he had stolen a bicycle and money from Johnson’s mother.

“Mr. Johnson orchestrated this meeting, and he and Mr. Trudeau planned to lure him to that spot and attack (Ketcham),” L’Heureux said. “Evidence will demonstrate this was a planned, orchestrated attack, and that Dylan’s actions

were a reaction to Mr. Johnson and Mr. Trudeau, and that he was justified in defending himself in this scenario. He was outnumbered, outmatched. He was alone and scared.”



Superior Court Justice Michaela Murphy, right, holds a side bar with counsel during the murder and attempted murder trial of Dylan Ketcham on Wednesday at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta. The Gardiner man is accused of attacking two former friends, shooting and killing one and nearly severing the wrists of the other with a machete during a 2020 altercation in Gardiner. *Andy Molloy/Kennebec Journal*

Although fewer videos were shown in court this time, Murphy allowed prosecutors to play some of the body camera footage and show the jury a still photograph from one of the videos as evidence, despite an objection from Stephen Smith, one of Ketcham’s two lawyers.

Videos shown included one of Gardiner police Patrolman Alonzo Connor discovering a motionless Johnson, facedown in the snow, whom he had discovered as other officers tended to the bloody Trudeau, who had crawled onto a porch of a Lincoln Avenue couple’s home and pleaded for help.

Johnson was struggling to breathe and did not respond or move when Connor spoke to him and later rolled him onto his back, revealing his blood-matted hair from the bullet that would take his life days later.

Photographs showed pools of blood on Lincoln Avenue, the blood-covered porch and front door of the home where Trudeau went for help and the commercial trash receptacle where police said they found the weapon used by Ketcham to attack Trudeau.

Mark Flomenbaum, the state's chief medical examiner who performed the autopsy on Johnson, said during his testimony the cause of death was a bullet wound that went through three lobes of Johnson's brain.

Elam said Ketcham and Johnson had exchanged text messages in the days and hours leading up to the confrontation, and Ketcham had prepared for days to kill Johnson. He stole a handgun from his sister, fashioned a sheath inside his Carhartt-like coat in which he hid a machete and duct-taped the treads of his boots, apparently to try to avoid leaving tracks.

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An image of the Gardiner baseball field submitted as evidence Wednesday during the trial of Dylan Ketcham for murder and attempted murder at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta. Ketcham is accused of attacking two former friends at the baseball field, shooting and killing one and nearly severing the wrists of the other with a machete in 2020. *Andy Molloy/Kennebec Journal*

Elam said Johnson, who was 22 at the time, agreed to meet Ketcham near Quimby Field, a location chosen by Ketcham, to settle a dispute. When Ketcham arrived in the neighborhood, he was approached not just by Johnson but also 21-year-old Trudeau. All three men were from Gardiner.

A confrontation ensued in which Ketcham shot Johnson in the head. Then, after Trudeau tried to wrestle the gun away from Ketcham, he reached into his coat and pulled out the hidden machete and used it to hack at Trudeau,

Elam said. Ketcham managed to get on top of Trudeau, slicing him with the machete on his head and multiple times on his arms.

Ketcham then fled the scene, according to witnesses, and was later found by State Trooper Eric Verhille and his tracking dog, Clint, underneath a barn off River Avenue, after about 25 minutes of searching and tracking, according to Gardiner Sgt. Normand Gove, who took part in tracking Ketcham.

While following Ketcham's apparent trail, Gove said police came across various items they later determined Ketcham had left along his way, including his boots with the bottom treads covered with duct tape, his pants, and a winter jacket.

A gun that officials later determined was the one that fired the bullet that killed Johnson was found in the snow, near where Trudeau and Johnson were found. The machete-like weapon used to cut Trudeau was found in a trash receptacle on Dresden Avenue, outside an Alzheimer's care center, along the path taken from the crime scene by Ketcham, as tracked by the police dog, according to state police Lt. Jason Richards.

The trial is expected to continue into next week. Proceedings will not take place Thursday due to a scheduling issue.

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