



Haley Bass, right, a Des Moines teenager charged with first-degree murder, hugs her defense attorney, Peter Berger, after a jury found her not guilty of the crime on Tuesday. BILL NEIBERGALL/THE REGISTER

Teen found not guilty

D.M. police aren't pursuing other suspects or leads in the murder case

By Grant Rodgers
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Haley Marie Bass, a Des Moines teenager charged with first-degree murder, broke down in tears Tuesday when a Polk County jury found her not guilty of shooting to death Anthony Moss.

Bass' family cheered when the jury's verdict was returned, less than three hours after deliberations began.

Outside the courthouse, defense attorney Peter Berger said Des Moines police focused on Bass from the outset of their investigation, ignoring other eyewitness testimony.

"From the very beginning I was sure of her innocence," he said. "The case made no sense from the beginning and the police backed the wrong horse."

Des Moines police are not pursuing any other suspects or leads unless they are presented to investigators, Sgt. Dan Blom said. Police officials believe the department completed a thorough investigation and made a strong case, he said.

Bass, 16, was charged with first-degree murder after Moss, 19, of Chicago, was found dead in a Forest Avenue apartment just

before 1:30 a.m. on April 14. Prosecutors had alleged Bass shot Moss in the head after smoking marijuana in the apartment with him and one other witness.

In her closing argument and rebuttal Tuesday morning, Assistant Polk County Attorney Stephanie Cox drew attention to

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DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Bass' actions after the shooting: Bass canceled her cellphone minutes after a Des Moines police detective contacted her and she left the state.

"As soon as Haley Bass knows police are looking for her and they want to talk to her, what does she do?" Cox said. "She gets rid of her phone, she gets a new one and she flees the state."

When detective Kurt Bender

first talked with Bass at 11:09 a.m. on the day of the shooting, Bass was returning a call he'd made earlier. When Bender said he was a detective, she said, "Wrong number," and hung up.

Seventeen minutes later, Bass called Sprint to cancel service to the phone, Cox said. By late afternoon, Bass was in Columbia, Mo. She returned to Des Moines the next day with her grandfather and an uncle and went to the police station with her attorney for an interview.

Berger, the defense attorney, countered with several points that he contended were major holes in the case against Bass. Prosecutors never offered a motive for why Bass would have wanted to kill Moss, he said.

At an evening news conference, Berger said Bass changed her cellphone number at the advice of her family. She was afraid of potential retaliation from gang members, and the family has had problems with threats and vandalism, he said.

"Haley lied about some things, she's 16 and was scared," he said.

Bass, through Berger, declined to speak to the media at the news conference.

Before the shooting, Bass and

See **HALEY**, Page 12B

HALEY

Continued from Page 1B

Moss were smoking marijuana in the apartment with Bass' friend Makayla Langerak, officials and

police have said. Another man, Deangelow Dudley, was also in the apartment. According to prosecutors, Bass said she needed to go outside and make a call; when she returned, she had donned a mask and she knocked on the door

and shot Moss.

During the trial, Langerak testified that she recognized Bass as the shooter from the blonde hair coming out of the mask. She and Bass got into her vehicle, and Langerak dropped her off at another man's house before returning home, Cox said.

However, Dudley, who hid in the bathroom after the shot, testified that Bass wasn't the shooter, Berger said. Rather, Dudley believed the shooter was a man.

"Mr. Dudley said in open court that the shooter was not Haley Bass," Berger said. "Case closed."

In his closing, Berger suggested that Kelly "Face" Neu, Langerak's boyfriend and father of her child, could have been the shooter. In her interviews with police and in her court testimony, Bass pointed to Neu as the

shooter, Berger said.

Langerak only said Bass was the shooter after Bender, the Des Moines police detective, told her that he believed Bass was the shooter, Berger said. The detective's suggestion gave Langerak an opportunity to save her boyfriend from being charged, he said.

Tuesday's verdict will give Bass, who dropped out of Scavo Alternative High School in January, an opportunity to get her life back in order, Berger said at the news conference. She intends to leave Des Moines and pursue a GED, he said.

"She dropped out of Scavo, she was hanging with the wrong people, and this is a second chance for her," he said. "She's going to be away from people she was hanging with, in a different environment, get an education and get a job."