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Marin gets life sentence

Needville man accused of killing girlfriend's baby

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The Needville man on trial for the 2006 death of a 10-month-old baby was found guilty of capital murder Tuesday, receiving a sentence of life in prison.

The only decision for the jury was the question of guilt or innocence for Pete Marin III, charged in the death of baby Jake Horrocks, who was hospitalized immediately after being alone with Marin for about 15 minutes in the pre-dawn hours of Feb. 23, 2006.

The guilty verdict came after hear-

ing from the boy's mother, who was dating Marin at the time, as well as a series of medical experts who disagreed on the timing of the boy's death.

Prosecutor Sury Morton said testimony from credible medical experts and an examination of Marin's behav-

ior around the time of the boy's death made a strong case for Marin's culpability.

Testimony showed Marin fled the scene when the baby became unconscious, rather than offering his assis-

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tance.

"Most people would help a stranger who had a child in that condition - let alone someone who spent time with them and claiming to care about the

baby's mother," Morton said. "(Fellow prosecutor) O'Shea (Spencer) and I are both very pleased and relieved the jury saw the truth and brought justice for baby Jake and held his killer accountable."

Doctors who treated the boy and examined him all said in court they saw injuries to such a degree that they would have resulted in the baby boy passing out and showing symptoms immediately, thus pointing the finger at Marin.

A medical researcher called by the defense, however, said his own research and that of others has demonstrated that children who die from trauma to the head can sometimes go for hours or even days without showing any symptoms. Defense attorney Don Bankston argued the possibility exists the boy had been injured well before being alone with Marin that day, clouding the case with reasonable doubt.

There were no witnesses, though the boy's mother, Jennifer Horrocks, said she heard a loud bang before she found the boy unconscious in Marin's arms. Marin did not testify in the trial.

The Needville Police Department and the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office investigated the case, which resulted in Marin's arrest on March 2, 2006.

Prosecutors never sought the death penalty, so Marin was automatically sentenced to life in prison. District Attorney

John Healey said he decided against seeking death in large part because Marin does not have any felony convictions in his record. Jurors must issue the death penalty based on a series of questions, including one that asks whether the defendant presents a future threat to society.

"Without prior convictions, the highest criminal court in Texas has been prone to reverse death penalty cases, because they do not believe there is sufficient showing of future danger, which is a required under the statute," Healey said.

He also conceded the evidence in the case was not "clear and multi-layered," given disagreements between medical experts.

Bankston, who represented Marin with the assistance of fellow attorney Ken Bryant, said he does not argue with the verdict.

"It's a complex issue. Any time you have doctors testifying, with varying views, it's also a tough case because the jury sees a tragic ending to a young infant," he said, "and they want to punish someone."