

Wednesday August 05, 2015
[The Buffalo News.com \(/\)](http://www.buffalonews.com/)

City & Region

OAKMONT AVENUE MAN ACQUITTED IN ROBBERY CASE

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Updated: April 16, 2000, 12:00 AM Published: April 16, 2000, 12:01 AM

Charles W. Coleman describes himself as a gambler.

His winning streak continued last week.

Coleman, 24, who previously was acquitted of murder charges and also survived a shooting, was found innocent of armed robbery charges that could have sent him to prison for 25 years.

Coleman, an Oakmont Avenue resident, smiled and thanked his attorney, Paul Gordon Dell, as the jury announced its acquittal verdict about 12:40 p.m. He declined to comment as he left court.

The verdict came after about an hour of deliberations following a three-day trial before Judge Timothy J. Drury. Coleman had been accused of the armed theft of men's jewelry he insisted he won in a dice game.

Dell said the verdict was "the right result" in a case prompted by what he called the wild thievery claims of a 21-year-old Buffalo man who was unlucky at dice. Prosecutors declined comment on Coleman's latest acquittal.

Coleman has been free on bail since shortly after being arrested by Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority police after a short foot chase down Metro Rail tracks two months after the alleged robbery. He testified Tuesday that he won the jewelry in a Lowell Street dice game last summer on a date he cannot recall.

Coleman told the jury he earns money from yearly payments he gets on a disability claim, by working part-time in a Buffalo barber shop and by gambling.

He insisted his alleged victim gave him two rings and a bracelet because he didn't have cash to pay off his losing dice game.

On Tuesday, the alleged victim told the jury he had met Coleman on a Metro bus and asked him if he knew the way to Grote Street shortly before the alleged robbery.

The man said that, when he got off the bus near Hinman Avenue, Coleman also got off, followed him and grabbed him and dragged him into an alley on Blum Avenue, where he pulled out a handgun and stole his jewelry.

The man also told the jury that when he walked into the Utica Street Metro Rail station two months after the robbery, he spotted Coleman and informed the NFTA police, sparking the brief chase.

On Sept. 14, 1995, a jury acquitted Coleman of the March 22, 1994, slaying of Daryl Billingslea, 17, and the May 25, 1994, shooting of a man never able to identify his attacker at an outdoor basketball court at the JFK Community Center on Hickory Street.

Police and prosecutors had accused Coleman of accidentally shooting the basketball player while trying to shoot an eyewitness in the slaying of Billingslea, who had been gunned down at close range during a drug incident on Seventh Street.

Coleman himself was shot in the leg during an early morning incident at an East Side nightclub on March 1, 1997.