

City loses police-killing suit

Jury takes version of gangs over cop

By Todd Lighty
Tribune staff reporter

Finding the testimony of gang members more credible than that of a veteran police officer, a Cook County jury Thursday awarded \$1.5 million to the family of an unarmed man killed by police in 1998 outside the Cabrini-Green housing complex.

The jury rejected Chicago po-

lice officer Kenny Lunsford's testimony that he shot Michael Russell in the back as Russell tried to flee after shooting a rival gang member.

Jurors found two gang members who disputed Lunsford's account to be the more believable than the officer.

"Were they more credible than the police officer? Absolutely," said forewoman Dorcas Wetherspoon of Chicago. "We came to the conclusion that the shooting was not justified. No guns were found, and the testimony of [Lunsford] was iffy."

Paul Fredericy, also from Chicago, said, "Lunsford just was not credible."

When the jury announced its decision, Russell's mother, Mildred Hamilton, began sobbing. Using a lawyer's cellular telephone, Hamilton called family members and shouted into the phone, "We won. We won."

The jury awarded \$900,000 to Russell's mother, two brothers and sister for loss of companionship and another \$600,000 to his estate for pain and suffering.

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