



PRESS RELEASE

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“UNTOUCHABLE” NASHVILLE DRUG KINGPIN SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR DISTRIBUTING OVER ONE TON OF COCAINE, MONEY LAUNDERING, FIREARMS, AND SOLICITING THE MURDER OF A FEDERAL WITNESS; ALSO PLEADS GUILTY TO MURDER IN 1993 STATE “COLD CASE” MURDER

Nashville, TN - January 28, 2008 - Edward M. Yarbrough, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, announced that Keith D. Smith a/k/a “Keezo”, age 34, of Nashville, TN, was sentenced to life imprisonment plus a consecutive five year sentence by U.S. District Judge William Haynes. Deciding that Smith should never be released from prison, Judge Haynes told the defendant, “An extraordinary case calls for an extraordinary sentence.” Judge Haynes also decided that a 35 year sentence imposed by state Criminal Court Judge Steve Dozier for a murder that Smith agreed to plead guilty to as a condition of his federal plea agreement would run consecutively to the federal sentence.

U.S. Attorney Edward Yarborough said “Tenacity and cooperation by state and federal investigators have permanently removed a long time menace from this community. The life sentence, and the fact that the court chose to run the state sentence consecutively, sends a clear message to those who would follow this criminal’s footsteps. Smith’s flash and cash impressed people and got others to follow his example. This sentence should stop them in their tracks.”

A lengthy Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force investigation led to Smith a/k/a “Keezo” pleading guilty to conducting a continuing criminal enterprise (commonly referred to as the “kingpin” statute), money laundering, possessing firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking, soliciting the murder of a federal witness, and other charges. This investigation also resulted in Smith agreeing to plead guilty to murdering Jeremy Allen in North Nashville in 1993, a case which was being pursued by the Metro Nashville Police Department’s Cold Case Unit, and the Nashville District Attorney General’s Office. In addition, Judge Haynes also found that Smith was responsible for the December 15, 2001 murder of Chris Gooch in the area of 9th and Cheatham in Nashville. That murder was actually carried out for Smith by DeSean Sanderson a/k/a “Ham” who previously pleaded guilty to that murder in state court.

According to testimony at the plea hearing, the defendant claimed he was “untouchable,” that he had the areas around 12th, 14th , and Cephas in North Nashville “locked down,” and that he was going to make a million dollars from drug sales just from those streets. The defendant’s crimes involved distribution of over 1000 kilograms (more than one ton) of cocaine as well as heroin and crack cocaine, millions of dollars in drug proceeds, and the possession of weapons including grenades. The defendant sometimes received shipments of 100 kilograms of cocaine - - worth over \$2,000,000 - - in the Hickory Hollow Mall parking lot by leaving a rental car in the parking lot. While the defendant waited in the mall, his drug suppliers would load the cocaine

into the rental car. The defendant and co-conspirators then hid the cocaine in self-storage lockers until it could be distributed.

After the defendant's cousin and co-conspirator, Charles Turner a/k/a "Papa Charlie," was arrested for federal drug and firearm offenses in February 2003, the defendant asked another co-conspirator, Nathan Morgan, to kill the informant who cooperated against Turner in the hopes of keeping Turner from cooperating against Smith. They then scouted the informant's church and home looking for the informant, but did not find him before Smith was arrested and held without bond on March 31, 2003. In arguing for a life sentence, the prosecutor pointed out that the defendant's actions in "scouting out a church as part of a plan to commit murder should shock the conscience of everyone in the community. Churches should be a sanctuary where everyone should feel safe - no matter what goes on in the community around them."

While the defendant was trying to have the informant killed, the defendant made statements showing that he was responsible for having Chris Gooch killed on December 15, 2001 by DeSean Sanderson a/k/a "Ham" near 9th and Cheatham in Nashville. Chris Gooch had previously pled guilty and was sentenced to four years imprisonment for his involvement in a drug conspiracy led by Darrell and Sean McQuiddy. After serving his four year sentence, Gooch was placed on supervised release in January 2001. Gooch later began obtaining cocaine from Smith. Smith incorrectly feared Gooch was cooperating with a federal investigation in an effort to assist Darrell McQuiddy who Smith owed for a previous drug debt. Smith then made statements to Sanderson indicating that Gooch should be killed. Sanderson then killed Gooch by shooting him twice in the head in the area of 9th and Cheatham on December 15, 2001. After Sanderson was arrested, Smith helped pay for Sanderson's legal fees through Mack Stone, who Judge Haynes sentenced to life imprisonment after a jury trial in 2004. Judge Haynes stated that the life sentence he imposed on Smith "reflected the life he took from Chris Gooch" whose family

members testified about the long-term impact the defendant inflicted on them when he decided to have Chris Gooch killed. United States Attorney Ed Yarbrough emphasized, “Threats, obstruction of justice, and murder will not stop law enforcement from carrying out their duties - - it only strengthens our resolve to see justice done.”

After Smith’s arrest, agents searched the defendant’s residence at 1605 Emerald Drive in the Bordeaux area and seized the defendant’s notes calculating payments for 60-70 kilogram cocaine loads. They also seized two loaded pistol grip pump shotguns which the defendant possessed to protect the large amounts of cocaine and cash the defendant often stored at this house. Agents also seized a loaded Thompson machine gun magazine and a loaded magazine for an AR-15 rifle, but did not recover those firearms. As part of the plea hearing, Smith also admitted that he possessed grenades and other firearms during the conspiracy.

The defendant obtained substantial income from his crimes, including millions of dollars of drug proceeds. He invested drug proceeds into the purchase of rental properties in the Nashville area, and attempted to invest \$150,000 in cash drug proceeds to buy an interest in a national music concert series to make it appear he had legitimate sources of income. That cash was seized from music promoters at the Atlanta airport in 1999. The defendant was also sentenced to forfeit his assets, including multiple rental properties that he bought with drug proceeds.

Smith also pled guilty in state court on January 23, 2008 to killing Jeremy Allen on January 27, 1993 in an alley near 12th and Cephas. Judge Haynes reviewed evidence relating to that murder which showed that Smith shot 18 year old Jeremy Allen with a .30 caliber carbine as Allen was running away from Smith. Smith fired fifteen bullets at Allen, and finally hit and killed Allen when he was about 300 feet away from Smith. Smith was arrested shortly after the murder, but the state charges were dismissed when witnesses failed to appear for court.

Additional evidence developed in the federal investigation was provided to the Metro Nashville Cold Case Unit which had continued to work on the 15 year old murder case with the Nashville District Attorney's Office. Smith was then charged with killing Jeremy Allen in state court, and pled guilty to that murder on January 23, 2008. That case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney General Pam Anderson, and was investigated by Detective E.J. Bernard (deceased) and by Detective Bill Pridemore of the Cold Case unit. Criminal Court Judge Steve Dozier sentenced Smith to 35 years imprisonment and permitted the federal court to decide whether the state sentence should run concurrently or consecutively with the federal sentence. Judge Haynes ordered the sentences to run consecutively so that Jeremy Allen's life could be given "value" rather than being absorbed in the federal charges.

This case is part of a multi-year Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation which has resulted in other arrests and pending prosecutions, and a life sentence against Mack Stone of Nashville after a jury convicted him of drug conspiracy. OCDETF investigations seek to dismantle entire organizations which are responsible for large scale drug trafficking. The Drug Enforcement Administration, IRS-Criminal Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the 20th Judicial District Drug Task Force, the Metro Nashville Police Department, and other agencies participated in the overall investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Sunny A.M. Koshy prosecuted Keith Smith and the other defendants in this investigation.

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