

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

State v. Runningfisher

2007 MT 156N (2007) · No. DA 06-0614 · Decided June 26, 2007

SUMMARY

The Montana Supreme Court reviewed John Runningfisher’s appeal from the denial of his motion for a new trial following convictions for criminal possession of dangerous drugs and criminal possession of drug paraphernalia. The court held that sufficient evidence supported the jury’s finding that Runningfisher constructively possessed the drugs and paraphernalia attached to a key ring. The court affirmed the District Court’s judgment and designated the decision as a noncitable memorandum opinion.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of Montana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	James C. Nelson; Karla M. Gray; John Warner; Patricia Cotter; Jim Rice
JURISDICTION	Montana
DECIDED	June 26, 2007
DOCKET	DA 06-0614
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant appealed the District Court's denial of his motion for a new trial following jury convictions for criminal possession of dangerous drugs and criminal possession of drug paraphernalia.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviews sufficiency of the evidence by viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution and asking whether any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. The court does not substitute its judgment for that of the jury regarding witness credibility and the weight of the evidence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Nonprecedential; memorandum decision expressly designated as noncitable.
PARTIES	John Runningfisher v. State of Montana

TOPICS

criminal procedure

evidence

appellate procedure

standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

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evidence

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether sufficient evidence supported the jury's finding beyond a reasonable doubt that Runningfisher constructively possessed the dangerous drugs and drug paraphernalia attached to the key ring.
2. Whether the District Court erred in denying Runningfisher's motion for a new trial based on insufficiency of the evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. The evidence was sufficient for a rational trier of fact to find beyond a reasonable doubt that Runningfisher constructively possessed the drugs and drug paraphernalia attached to the key ring.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“We review the sufficiency of the evidence to determine whether, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt.” (¶ 7)

“It is manifest on the face of the briefs and the record before us that the appeal is without merit because, in viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, we determine that there was sufficient evidence from which the jury could conclude that Runningfisher constructively possessed the drugs and drug paraphernalia.” (¶ 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Police detained John Runningfisher shortly after he rode a bicycle past a residence in Great Falls, Montana. A nearby property owner stated that Runningfisher had dropped his keys; officers found a small vial attached to the key ring, and testing showed that the vial contained methamphetamine. The property owner testified that the keys had not been on his recently cleaned lawn before Runningfisher passed by and were found next to a fresh footprint where Runningfisher had steadied himself.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A Cascade County jury found Runningfisher guilty of criminal possession of dangerous drugs and criminal possession of drug paraphernalia. The District Court denied his motion for a new trial based on alleged insufficiency of the evidence and imposed deferred sentences. Runningfisher appealed, and the Montana Supreme Court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Shields, 2005 MT 249, 328 Mont. 509, 122 P.3d 421
- State v. Stevens, 2002 MT 181, 311 Mont. 52, 53 P.3d 356
- State v. Azure, 2002 MT 22, 308 Mont. 201, 41 P.3d 899

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