

SUPREME COURT OF DELAWARE

Stickel v. State

975 A.2d 780 (Del. 2009) · No. No. 348, 2008 · Decided June 16, 2009

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Delaware affirmed Frederick Stickel's convictions for two counts each of second-degree vehicular homicide and driving under the influence of alcohol. The court held that the trial judge properly admitted toxicology reports showing that the two deceased motorcyclists had not consumed drugs or alcohol because Stickel had placed their potentially dangerous driving behavior at issue.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Delaware
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Holland, Justice; Steele, Chief Justice; Jacobs, Justice
JURISDICTION	Delaware
DECIDED	June 16, 2009
DOCKET	No. 348, 2008
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Direct appeal from the Superior Court's final judgment of conviction following a jury trial.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Evidentiary rulings are reviewed for abuse of discretion. A decision to admit testimony as relevant will not be reversed absent a clear abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Delaware Supreme Court opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	Frederick G. Stickel v. State of Delaware

TOPICS

- relevance
- evidence
- criminal procedure
- standard of review
- appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Evidence
- Criminal law
- Criminal procedure
- Appellate law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Superior Court abused its discretion by admitting toxicology reports showing that the decedents had not consumed drugs or alcohol.
2. Whether the toxicology reports were relevant to the issue of whether the decedents' conduct caused the accident.

HOLDINGS

1. Because Stickel placed the decedents' driving behavior in issue by asserting that they were speeding, drag racing, or otherwise driving dangerously, evidence that they had not consumed drugs or alcohol was relevant and admissible.
2. The trial judge did not abuse his discretion in admitting the toxicology reports.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“We hold that, because the decedents' behavior in driving their motorcycles was an issue in Stickel's case, the trial judge properly concluded that the toxicology reports showing that the decedents had not consumed drugs or alcohol constituted relevant evidence.” (785)

“Therefore, the record reflects that the trial judge properly exercised his discretion when he admitted the evidence that the decedents had not consumed drugs or alcohol.” (785)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On September 24, 2007, Frederick Stickel drove his SUV while intoxicated and turned left across Route 273, colliding with motorcycles ridden by Luis Coreano and Jose Baez; both motorcyclists died. Stickel's blood alcohol content was .108, and trial evidence included conflicting accounts about whether the decedents were speeding, drag racing, or otherwise driving dangerously. Over Stickel's objection, the State introduced toxicology reports showing that neither decedent had drugs or alcohol in his system.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Stickel was indicted on two counts of first-degree vehicular homicide and related offenses after his intoxicated driving caused a collision that killed two motorcyclists. Following trial, the jury convicted him of two counts each of the lesser-included offenses of second-degree vehicular homicide and driving under the influence of alcohol. The Superior Court sentenced him to four years' imprisonment followed by probation, and Stickel filed a timely direct appeal challenging admission of the decedents' toxicology reports.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Charbonneau v. State, 904 A.2d 295 (Del. 2006)
- Moorhead v. State, 638 A.2d 52 (Del. 1994)
- Lampkins v. State, 465 A.2d 785 (Del. 1983)

- Lilly v. State, 649 A.2d 1055 (Del. 1994)
- Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. v. Adams, 541 A.2d 567 (Del. 1988)
- Smith v. State, 560 A.2d 1004 (Del. 1989)
- Getz v. State, 538 A.2d 726 (Del. 1988)
- Zdina v. State, 1997 WL 328593, at *1 (Del. May 23, 1997)
- Miller v. State, 236 Ga. App. 825, 513 S.E.2d 27 (1999)
- City of Wauwatosa v. Guetzkow, 1987 WL 267122 (Wis. Ct. App. Mar. 16, 1987)
- Farmer v. State, 770 So. 2d 953 (Miss. 2000)