

ARKANSAS COURT OF APPEALS, DIVISION I

Eric Stevens v. State of Arkansas

2026 Ark. App. 232 · No. CR-25-238 · Decided April 15, 2026

SUMMARY

The Arkansas Court of Appeals affirmed Eric Stevens’s conviction for second-degree sexual assault. The court held that Stevens’s sufficiency-of-the-evidence arguments were not preserved because his directed-verdict motions did not specifically challenge the elements at issue on appeal. The court also upheld the exclusion of alleged impeachment evidence concerning a prior false accusation by the victim, concluding that the circuit court did not abuse its discretion and that any error was harmless.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Arkansas Court of Appeals, Division I
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Robert J. Gladwin; Klappenbach, C.J.; Hixson, J.
JURISDICTION	Arkansas Court of Appeals
DECIDED	April 15, 2026
DOCKET	CR-25-238
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Stevens appealed his conviction for second-degree sexual assault after the Ashley County Circuit Court denied his directed-verdict motions, excluded proposed impeachment evidence, and sentenced him to twenty years in the Arkansas Division of Correction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Sufficiency of the evidence is reviewed by considering only evidence supporting the verdict in the light most favorable to the State and determining whether substantial evidence supports the conviction. Evidentiary rulings are reviewed for abuse of discretion and will not be reversed absent a manifest abuse and prejudice. Preserved evidentiary error is harmless when the evidence of guilt is overwhelming and the error is slight.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Arkansas Court of Appeals opinion
PARTIES	Eric Stevens v. State of Arkansas

TOPICS

criminal procedure

appellate procedure

preservation of error

evidence

impeachment

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal procedure

evidence

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Stevens preserved his challenges to the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the physically helpless and sexual-contact elements of second-degree sexual assault.
2. Whether the circuit court abused its discretion by excluding evidence that MC allegedly had previously made a false accusation that Stevens supplied her with drugs.
3. If exclusion of the impeachment evidence was error, whether the error was harmless.

HOLDINGS

1. A defendant may not change the grounds of a directed-verdict motion on appeal. Because Stevens argued below that sleep was not unconsciousness but argued on appeal that MC was not asleep when the assault began, his physical-helplessness challenge was not preserved.
2. A sufficiency challenge is not preserved when the directed-verdict motion fails to challenge the specific element supporting the conviction. Stevens challenged sexual intercourse and deviate sexual activity below, but not sexual contact, the element required for his second-degree-sexual-assault conviction.
3. A formal proffer is not required when the substance of excluded evidence is apparent from the context. The substance of Stevens's proposed testimony was sufficiently developed during the hearing on the motion in limine, so the evidentiary issue was preserved.
4. The circuit court did not abuse its discretion by excluding evidence that MC allegedly made a prior false accusation against Stevens. The evidence had minimal probative value, was unsupported by independent proof, and its admission would have revealed otherwise inadmissible juvenile-delinquency information; its probative value was substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice.
5. Even assuming the circuit court erred in excluding the impeachment evidence, any error was harmless because the evidence of Stevens's guilt was overwhelming and the alleged error was slight.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Because this is a change in the grounds asserted below, we hold that Stevens’s argument is not preserved for appellate review.” (5)

“The balancing of probative value against unfair prejudice lies squarely within the circuit court’s discretion, and we will not substitute our judgment on appeal absent a manifest abuse of discretion.” (7)

“Even if the circuit court erred, any error was harmless.” (8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Seventeen-year-old MC reported that Stevens, her uncle's forty-five-year-old friend, entered her bedroom while she was asleep and sexually assaulted her. MC identified Stevens, and law enforcement later collected her clothing and a rape kit. Testing found male DNA and sperm in the rape-kit evidence and Stevens's DNA on MC's underwear. Stevens admitted being in MC's bedroom but denied having sex with her.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Stevens was charged with rape. Before trial, the circuit court granted the State's motion to exclude evidence that the minor victim had allegedly made a prior false accusation against Stevens. A jury convicted Stevens of the lesser-included offense of second-degree sexual assault, and the circuit court imposed a twenty-year sentence. The Arkansas Court of Appeals held that Stevens's sufficiency arguments were not preserved, rejected his preserved evidentiary challenge, and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Muhammad v. State, 2026 Ark. App. 184, ___ S.W.3d ___
- Walker v. State, 2023 Ark. App. 295, 669 S.W.3d 243
- Herrington v. State, 2025 Ark. App. 316, 717 S.W.3d 536
- Maxwell v. State, 373 Ark. 553, 285 S.W.3d 195 (2008)
- Dean v. State, 2025 Ark. App. 87, 704 S.W.3d 926
- Tilmon v. State, 2022 Ark. App. 291, 646 S.W.3d 286
- Billett v. State, 317 Ark. 346, 877 S.W.2d 913 (1994)
- Swinford v. State, 85 Ark. App. 326, 154 S.W.3d 262
- James v. State, 2026 Ark. App. 103, ___ S.W.3d ___
- Maiden v. State, 2014 Ark. 294, 438 S.W.3d 263
- Wright v. State, 2019 Ark. App. 364, 584 S.W.3d 711
- Scaggs v. State, 2020 Ark. App. 142, 596 S.W.3d 562
- Devries v. State, 2019 Ark. App. 478, 588 S.W.3d 139
- Smith v. State, 2025 Ark. 26, 708 S.W.3d 336
- Gladden v. State, 2025 Ark. App. 78, 706 S.W.3d 741
- Dority v. State, 2025 Ark. App. 607