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Yawning witness accused of 'lying through his teeth' to Hamill inquiry

By Lesley-Anne Henry
Friday, 13 March 2009

The only man convicted in connection with the murder of Robert Hamill has denied lying to a public inquiry.

Marc Hobson, who was jailed for affray, also dismissed allegations he had ordered a key prosecution witness to retract a statement that placed him at the scene of the fatal attack on April 27, 1997.

Murder charges against Mr Hobson and five others were dramatically dropped in 1998 after two witnesses, Jonathan Wright and Tracey Clarke, refused to testify in court.

Yesterday's sitting at the Interpoint Centre in Belfast heard how Jonathan Wright and Marc Hobson had been friends and were socialising together on the night in question.

Mr Wright, who was never accused of involvement in the killing, gave three statements to police in the weeks after Mr Hamill's death but later withdrew the second version in which he claimed Marc Hobson had been trying to "pull people out" of the fight.

Giving evidence yesterday, Mr Wright told the inquiry that his statement of May 15, 1997, had been made under pressure from police.

Meanwhile Marc Hobson, who was called to give evidence yesterday, described Mr Wright's statement as "a load of lies".

"When I got my PE papers I couldn't believe what he said. Complete and utter lies," he said.

Mr Hobson, who has consistently denied being anywhere near the row, also refused to accept suggestions from the Hamill family barrister that he had ordered the statement to be withdrawn.

Barra McGrory QC asked: "Are you saying you had no hand in that withdrawal?"

"Yes I am," said Mr Hobson.

Throughout the proceedings Marc Hobson yawned and grinned. When asked about his "cocky" attitude by Barra McGrory QC he said: "Maybe it is just the way I get on when I am nervous."

He denied suggestions from Charles Adair QC, who is representing a number of police officers, that he was treating the inquiry with contempt.

"You are just sitting lying through your teeth," said Mr Adair.

Mr Hobson replied: "No, considering I got time for something I didn't do."

The tribunal was also told how Mr Hobson was moved into the UVF wing of the Maze prison.

He said there was more opportunity to talk to his co-accused at the Maze but denied that the transfer had been a deliberate bid to intimidate witnesses.

"I was getting a hard time at Hydebank from nationalists. There was a more free environment in the Maze," he said.

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