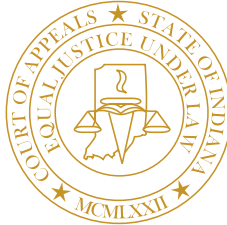


MEMORANDUM DECISION

Pursuant to Ind. Appellate Rule 65(D), this Memorandum Decision is not binding precedent for any court and may be cited only for persuasive value or to establish res judicata, collateral estoppel, or law of the case.



IN THE Court of Appeals of Indiana

Rodney Grant Taylor,
Appellant-Defendant

v.

State of Indiana,
Appellee-Plaintiff

April 24, 2025

Court of Appeals Case No.
24A-CR-3006

Appeal from the St. Joseph Superior Court
The Honorable Jeffrey L. Sandford, Judge
Trial Court Cause No.
71D03-2308-MR-14

Memorandum Decision by Chief Judge Altice
Judges Brown and Taviton concur.

Altice, Chief Judge.

Case Summary

[1] After pleading guilty to Level 2 felony armed robbery resulting in serious bodily injury, the trial court sentenced Rodney Grant Taylor to the maximum term of thirty years. On appeal, Taylor argues that his sentence is inappropriate.

[2] We affirm.

Facts & Procedural History

[3] On October 15, 2021, Taylor drove Quadir Quiroz, Tobias Shaw, and Travis Logan to Sa'Sha Agnew's home in South Bend to carry out an armed robbery that the four of them had planned.¹ As agreed, Quiroz, Shaw, and Logan went into Agnew's home to rob her of drugs and/or money, while Taylor waited in the get-away car. During the robbery, Agnew was shot and killed. The three men then exited the home, and Taylor drove them all away.

[4] On August 1, 2023, the State charged Taylor with two counts of murder, one count of Level 2 felony armed robbery resulting in serious bodily injury, one count of Level 3 felony armed robbery, and one count of Level 3 felony conspiracy to commit armed robbery. On October 23, 2024, Taylor pled guilty pursuant to a plea agreement to Level 2 felony armed robbery resulting in

¹ Taylor had told at least one of the others that Agnew was dealing synthetic marijuana and had cash at her house.

serious bodily injury and in exchange, the State agreed to dismiss the remaining charges. Taylor also agreed to cooperate with the State in the prosecution of his accomplices and in a separate murder prosecution. The plea agreement provided that sentencing would be at the discretion of the trial court. On November 22, 2024, the trial court sentenced Taylor to the maximum term of thirty years. *See* Ind. Code § 35-50-2-4.5.² Taylor now appeals.

Discussion & Decision

- [5] Taylor seeks our independent review of the appropriateness of his sentence under Ind. Appellate Rule 7(B), which allows us to revise a sentence if “after due consideration of the trial court’s decision” we find that “the sentence is inappropriate in light of the nature of the offense and the character of the offender.” *Id.*; *see also Hoak v. State*, 113 N.E.3d 1209, 1209 (Ind. 2019) (“Even when a trial court imposes a sentence within its discretion, the Indiana Constitution authorizes independent appellate review and revision of this sentencing decision.”).
- [6] Our principal task in this regard is “‘to attempt to leaven the outliers,’ not to achieve a ‘correct’ result in every case.” *Hancz-Barron v. State*, 235 N.E.3d 1237, 1248 (Ind. 2024) (quoting *Cardwell v. State*, 895 N.E.2d 1219, 1225 (Ind. 2008)). “And we generally defer to the sentence imposed unless a defendant presents

² I.C. § 35-50-2-4.5 provides: “A person who commits a Level 2 felony shall be imprisoned for a fixed term of between ten (10) and thirty (30) years, with the advisory sentence being seventeen and one-half (17 ½) years.”

‘compelling evidence’ portraying the nature of the offense and their character in a positive light.” *Id.* (quoting *Stephenson v. State*, 29 N.E.3d 111, 122 (Ind. 2015)). Thus, Taylor bears the responsibility of persuading us that his sentence is inappropriate. *See Robinson v. State*, 91 N.E.3d 574, 577 (Ind. 2018).

[7] Regarding the nature of the offense, Taylor asserts that he was not the shooter but only the driver to and from the scene of the crime. Taylor vastly understates his role in the crime, as he was the instigator and was involved in both the planning and execution of the robbery that led to Agnew’s death. He was also fully aware that the other, much younger participants, were going to be armed with guns during the commission of the offense. As the trial court stated during the sentencing hearing, Taylor was old and experienced enough to know the likely outcome of his actions. *See Bethea v. State*, 983 N.E.2d 1134, 1145 (Ind. 2013) (holding that courts may also consider facts underlying charges dismissed pursuant to plea agreement). Taylor has not demonstrated that the nature of the offense is deserving of a lesser sentence.

[8] Taylor has also not shown that his character warrants a lesser sentence. As the trial court noted, Taylor has an extensive criminal history that includes nine misdemeanor and four felony convictions. His first involvement with the juvenile justice system began when Taylor was twelve years old. He accumulated numerous warnings from the juvenile court and juvenile adjudications for battery, theft, and robbery, for the latter of which he was committed to the Indiana Boys’ School. After Taylor turned eighteen, he was convicted of his first felony for possessing cocaine. After twice violating his

probation, he was committed to the Indiana Department of Correction (DOC). A year after being released from the DOC, Taylor was convicted of domestic battery and criminal trespass. When he was twenty-three years old, he was convicted of his second felony for cocaine possession, for which he was committed to the DOC. A year and a half after being released, Taylor was convicted of his third felony for bank robbery and committed to the Bureau of Prisons (BOP). After his release, Taylor was twice returned to the BOP for violating the terms of his release. Taylor was released from the BOP for the last time in 2008. Four years later, he was convicted of domestic battery for a second time. In 2015, Taylor was convicted of his fourth felony when he was caught in possession of a firearm. Taylor was returned to the BOP, where he remained from June 2015 through May 2020. Less than eighteen months after his release, Taylor helped plan and execute the robbery of Agnew.

- [9] Taylor does not dispute his criminal history; rather, he points out that he accepted responsibility in this case. He also notes that he agreed to cooperate with the State in the prosecution of the others involved in Agnew's death as well as in another murder prosecution in which he was not involved but had relevant information. Taylor, however, overlooks the fact that he received a substantial benefit from the plea agreement in that he pled guilty to a Level 2 felony and the State dismissed, among others, a murder charge that carried a significantly heavier sentence. Taylor has not met his burden of demonstrating that his character is deserving of a lesser sentence.

[10] In sum, Taylor has failed to present compelling evidence portraying the nature of his offense or his character in a positive light. The thirty-year sentence imposed by the trial court is not inappropriate.

[11] Judgment affirmed.

Brown, J. and Tavitas, J., concur.

ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

Sean P. Hilgendorf
South Bend, Indiana

ATTORNEYS FOR APPELLEE

Theodore E. Rokita
Indiana Attorney General

Andrew M. Sweet
Deputy Attorney General
Indianapolis, Indiana