

Tyler Man Sentenced For Intoxicated Assault

By CASEY KNAUPP
Staff Writer

Isaac Dargam was on his way to church on March 4 when his life changed forever. Before, the former military man worked at a Tyler manufacturer and was very active. Now, paralyzed from the chest down, it is a struggle for him to sit up and dress himself.

On Friday, David [redacted] 24, Tyler, was sentenced to eight years in prison for driving intoxicated and causing the wreck that injured Dargam. He pleaded guilty to intoxicated assault with a deadly weapon, for which he faced two to 10 years in prison. He will have to serve four years before he is eligible for parole. Judge Kerry Russell, of the 7th District Court, also ordered him to pay restitution — the victim's ongoing medical bills.

[redacted] also acknowledged his guilt for possessing marijuana at the time of the accident. The judge considered the misdemeanor, which will be dismissed, in his sentence.

On the morning of March 4, [redacted] who was driving a Chrysler New Yorker, "blew" threw a stop sign at the intersection of County Road 21 and CR 26, and "T-boned" the GMC Sonoma driven by Dargam, Assistant Smith County District Attorney Peter Keim said. The defendant's blood alcohol contact after the collision was a .14, nearly twice the legal limit of intoxication in Texas, which is .08.

Dargam, 37, testified from his wheelchair that the last thing he

remembered was making a right turn on his way to church, then waking up on his back, looking at the sky. An air ambulance took him to a Tyler hospital, where he would stay for three weeks. Dargam was unconscious for days, and when he woke, he was told he would be forever paralyzed, he said.

The victim then stayed in a Dallas hospital for more than four months and had to "learn to live."

His wrist had been broken, his neck fractured, his right shoulder rotator cuff torn, his nerves in his left arm damaged and his left femur broken. Multiple surgeries left hardware in his body, including a rod in his back.

His wife couldn't handle the situation, so Dargam went back to his native South Carolina to live with his parents, he said. Since then, he hasn't been able to see his three young children, to whom he was very close.

Dargam, who spent 10 years in the Marine Corps, had worked for Kelly Springfield for seven years and was a part-time minister. The victim still preaches but, he said, it is not the same.

He described the physical struggles he endures every day and said things everyone takes for granted, such as simple tasks, take him a long time to do. Before, he was a very active person but is not able to do those things anymore.

He said a lot has changed since

the accident, but "it is what it is." He finds strength through his faith in God and from his family support.

"As soon as I was aware and woke up (after the accident) I forgave you," Dargam told the defendant during victim impact statements. "I have no hard feelings or anything toward you."

He said he prayed for [redacted] all the time — that out of this, he would "turn this thing around" and make an impact by helping anyone he could to avoid this. He said it would make him really happy if [redacted] came to know God like he did.

David Dargam, the victim's brother, said God allowed [redacted] to make that mistake for a reason and he hoped the defendant learned from it.

"We don't hate you at all," he said. "We're a loving family ... we all make mistakes."

He said God was forgiving so they had to forgive.

ATTORNEYS ARGUE

Defense attorney Brett Harrison called the case a tragedy and said it was a horrible accident that wasn't caused intentionally. He said it was an awful, unfair event for the victim, who was totally innocent. [redacted] accepted responsibility and understands that nothing he can do could undo what he did, he said.

The victim "will suffer for the

rest of his life and anything I go through will not compare," Harrison said, reading from a letter written by his client.

[redacted] wants children to learn from his mistake and stay away from drugs and alcohol, Harrison said. He is a single father of a 3-year-old girl and has worked all of his life while going to school. He asked the court for leniency in his sentence.

Keim agreed it was a tragedy because [redacted] chose to drink, smoke pot and drive. He said he didn't intend to injure the victim but certainly intended to become intoxicated and drive a vehicle. He said the wrong would never be righted and Dargam's children would be deprived of all of their father for the rest of their lives.

"This can't be fixed," he said. "It can only be punished."

He said [redacted]'s terrible error in judgment merited the full 10-year sentence.

The judge said the victim would never stand and walk again because [redacted] set out to drink and drive. Russell praised the victim for his strong faith.



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