

NATIONAL POLICE DEFENSE
FOUNDATION

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“SAFE COP PROGRAM”

Press Release

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ANOTHER BIG WIN FOR THE NPDF!
PA POLICE OFFICER JONATHAN ROSELLE
FOUND NOT GUILTY

ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA, MARCH 19, 2020; Executive Director Joseph Occhipinti proudly announced that after one day of deliberation, a jury in Leigh High County returned a non-guilty verdict for manslaughter.

BACKGROUND

On the afternoon of July 28, 2018, Officer Jonathan Roselle of the South Whitehall Township Police Department in Pennsylvania was watching traffic when a terrified woman pulled up next to him. She was screaming hysterically that a man had just tried to force his way into her car with her in it (a carjacking and possible kidnapping). The woman told Roselle that the man was trying to do the same thing to other drivers. Roselle turned on his lights and headed down the street where he could see the man (Joseph Santos) hanging on the side of a moving car, which accelerated to throw Santos off. As Santos walked toward the police car, he made a gesture; pointing two fingers first at his own eyes and then at Roselle (e.g., “I’m looking at you”). Roselle took this as a threat by Santos. Santos then approached the police car and began banging on the driver’s side window. Roselle could see that Santos’ hands and arms were bleeding. Given Santos’ threatening behavior, and not knowing whether Santos was armed, Roselle drew his handgun and ordered Santos multiple times to get away from his car. Santos ignored these commands. Roselle called for backup.

Santos eventually moved to the front of the police car and climbed up onto the car’s hood. Santos was very muscular and was bleeding from his arms and/or hands. Santos began pounding on the car’s

windshield and after a few blows the car's dashboard camera was knocked out of its mounting and fell into the car. Roselle accelerated slightly and swerved the car to slide Santos off the car's hood. Roselle then put out another radio call, advising that Santos was covered in blood and was attacking his police car, he said he would stay in the car until backup arrived.

Before any other officers arrived however, Santos began to walk away from the police car, Roselle believed Santos posed a significant danger to the many pedestrians in the area, as well as to people in the slow-moving vehicles watching the events unfold. Roselle then stepped out of his police car with his service pistol drawn and ordered Santos multiple times in a loud voice to get down on the ground. Instead of following Roselle's commands, Santos came walking briskly toward the officer. Roselle says he found Santos' behavior particularly threatening, as Santos was now coming directly toward him and ignoring his repeated commands, even though he had his service pistol pointed at Santos.

Roselle was standing near the open door of his police car as Santos continued toward him in defiance of the repeated commands at gunpoint to get on the ground. When Santos got about 10-15 feet from Roselle, Roselle realized that he had a fraction of a second before Santos would be on top of him. Roselle feared that Santos may have had a concealed weapon or would try to disarm the officer of his own pistol. At that point Roselle fired 5 shots at Santos; striking him with all 5. He stopped firing when he saw Santos falling to the ground and realized he was no longer a threat. Santos fell with his head only a few feet from the officer. The first backup officer arrived approximately one minute after the shooting. Santos was pronounced dead at a local hospital.

Roselle says Santos appeared to have superhuman strength; was physically bigger than the officer; seemed impervious to pain; and appeared to be under the influence of a controlled substance and/or mentally imbalanced. Roselle believed that if Santos got to him, Santos could very likely disarm him and then kill the officer and use the pistol against others. Retreating would have given Santos access to the police car, which contained a 12-gauge shotgun and an AR-15 rifle. Toxicology reports, completed after Roselle was charged, indicate Santos was under the influence of heroin, morphine, codeine, and other controlled substances at the time of the incident.

CONCLUSION

The NPDF established a legal defense fund for Police Officer Roselle, who was terminated by his department and was credited for raising much needed funds for his defense that included expert witnesses.

This acquittal demonstrates the NPDF's commitment to support law enforcement officials when it appears their prosecution may have been selectively prosecuted for serious felony crimes arising out of their official duties.

For further information on the prosecution of Police Officer Jonathan Roselle or to make a tax-deductible donation towards his legal defense fund, call 732-617-2330 or go online to www.npdf.org.