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For the Star-Gazette

A Beardstown man was found guilty of second degree murder last Thursday in the stabbing death of a carnival worker in July 2013.

A Schuyler County jury returned the verdict against Jared Staake, 22, who was charged with stabbing Michael Box, 33, of Dyersburg, TN, early July 2 at the Schuyler County Fairgrounds. Box died two days later from septic shock due to the stabbing wound. Staake was arrested on July 5.

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Schuyler County State's Attorney, Ramon Escapa said, "I am pleased with the jury verdict of second degree murder. The state had to prove first degree before this could be handed down by the jury."

The trial got underway on Monday, Jan. 13. According to news reports, Staake was visiting a friend, Shawn Fox, whose family owns the concessions booked with the carnival, and was with a group which included concession employee, Casey Slusser of Hillsboro, MO. Box and Slusser had been participating in a beer pong game.

Staake was later invited to Slusser's sleeping berth which is part of a trailer which includes two sleeping units, the other used by Box. According to testimony, Box had agreed to be Slusser's protector while she was traveling with the carnival. When Box realized that Staake was in Slusser's unit, Box began pounding on the partition dividing the two berths. He then went outside and began banging on the door of Slusser's unit. Staake went outside and in the ensuing events, Box threw a "sucker" punch at Staake who then pulled out a knife, stabbing Box in the abdomen. Staake left the scene.

Box was taken to Culbertson Memorial Hospital, but refused treatment and was combative, leaving the hospital against the advice of hospital staff, according to the testimony of ER physician Mark Day. Testimony revealed that Box had a blood-alcohol content of .179. Two days later, Box was found unresponsive on July 4 at his trailer, with his death attributed to the stabbing wound.

Staake testified during the trial and claimed that he feared for his life, according to news sources. Staake reportedly said "I was trying to stop him, that's all I was doing."

The prosecution contended that "just one punch" did not warrant stabbing Box.

Defense attorney Mark Wykoff said he was "extremely disappointed" with the verdict. He noted that at the opening of the trial the first degree murder charge was changed from the theory of intent to kill to the theory of death or a strong probability of doing great bodily harm. The court also allowed the state, after the close of testimony, to instruct the jury that it could consider a second degree murder charge if it believed there were mitigating circumstances. The defense counsel objected to this motion. Wykoff said he believed the state had failed to meet its burden of proof and offered the option of second degree murder as a "compromise verdict."

Wykoff said that he would take procedural steps necessary for an appeal if the defendant decides to appeal the case.

Sentencing has been set for March 13. Staake faces up to 20 years in prison. Presiding at the

trial was Judge Alesia McMillen