

# Williams pleads guilty to 2002 assault

By Samantha Henry  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

SOMERVILLE, N.J. — Former NBA star Jayson Williams, his personal life in shambles, took responsibility for accidentally shooting his limousine driver to death eight years ago by pleading guilty Monday to assault and agreeing to serve at least 18 months in prison.

Williams was awaiting retrial on a reckless manslaughter count but pleaded guilty to the lesser aggravated assault count for the 2002 death of Costas Christofi.

Williams remained poised during the hearing and mostly answered yes and no questions, though he did tell the judge that he had not fully checked a shotgun he was showing off to friends before snapping it closed.

"I didn't look in the direction the muzzle of the gun was pointed," he said, before admitting that his handling of the gun was reckless and that the gunshot caused Christofi's death.

Williams, who was charged with drunken driving after crashing his SUV into a tree in New York last week, had stitches visible above his right eye.

"Today is the first step in moving toward closure," said Williams' attorney, Joseph Hayden. He and Williams both declined to speak further about the case, citing a gag order.

The assault charge carries a minimum 18-month sentence because a gun was involved. The reckless manslaughter count

would have carried a maximum 10-year prison sentence.

Under his plea agreement, Williams will serve 18 months in state prison for the aggravated assault charge and up to five years for a prior conviction of trying to cover up the crime. The sentences will be concurrent and he'll be eligible for parole after 18 months.

"Jayson is relieved that closure has come to this matter," said Williams' friend and manager, Akhtar Farzaie. "He remains frustrated that he can't speak about it. He would have agreed to the aggravated assault charges years ago, but it was never an option."

Williams has been free on bail since the shooting.

On Monday, the prosecution asked that his bail be revoked. Deputy Attorney General Steven Farman cited the recent New York accident, among other incidents, before saying, "The public has a right to be protected from Jayson Williams."

State Superior Court Judge Edward M. Coleman allowed him to remain free, with restrictions, until his Feb. 23 sentencing.

Williams was acquitted in 2004 of aggravated manslaughter and convicted of trying to cover up the shooting. The jury deadlocked on a reckless manslaughter count, and a retrial on that charge was due to start this week.

Witnesses testified during the trial that Williams was showing off a shotgun when he snapped the weapon shut and it fired, hitting Christofi. They also testified that

Williams initially put the gun in the dead man's hands and told witnesses to lie about what happened.

On Monday, Williams said he had been giving about 10 friends a tour of his New Jersey home on Feb. 14, 2002, and when they reached the bedroom, he started showing them his gun collection. While showing off a double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun, Williams admitted Monday, he failed to check the safety mechanism and inspected only one of the two barrels before snapping it shut.

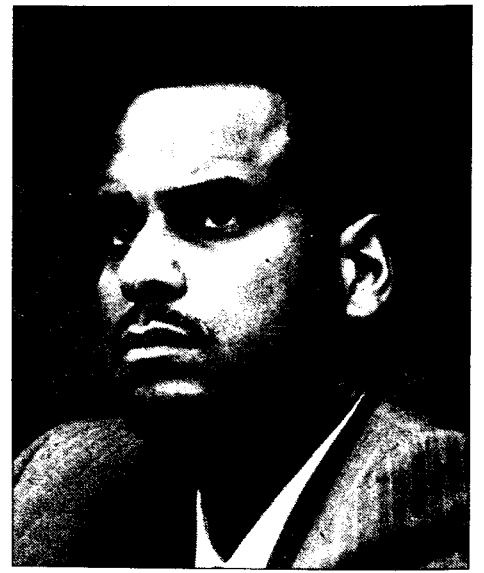
The defense maintained the shooting was an accident and that Williams panicked afterward.

Years of legal sparring followed the trial. Defense attorneys tried to get the case tossed out, citing a racial slur uttered by a white investigator during a meeting with other law enforcement officials. A judge, however, ruled against Williams, who is black, on appeal.

In November, it appeared a plea deal had been reached, but was indefinitely postponed at the last minute. His lawyers asked to be removed from his defense, citing client communication issues.

The Christofi family, who was in the courtroom when Williams pleaded guilty, declined to comment. Williams paid the family more than \$2 million in 2003 to settle a wrongful death lawsuit.

Williams, 41, played nine seasons with the Philadelphia 76ers and New Jersey Nets before a leg injury forced him to retire in 2000. Williams was in the second



Former NBA star Jayson Williams pled guilty to assault for a 2002 shooting of his driver.

year of a six-year, \$86 million contract. He became an NBA analyst for NBC but was suspended after Christofi's shooting. He attempted a short-lived comeback in the minor league Continental Basketball Association in 2005.

Williams has suffered several recent personal setbacks.

His wife filed for divorce last year, although she sat behind him in court Monday and later accompanied him out of the courthouse.

Police used a stun gun on him in a New York hotel after a female friend said he was acting suicidal.

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**By Jacqueline Bigar**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010. This year, the unexpected often jolts you. You might wonder if you are taking matters too personally or making a big deal out of something that really isn't that big of a deal. Process and rethink happenings and issues as if others' behavior weren't directed at you. You might see a situation in a much more positive vein. You can make a lot of money, and you could spend even more if you're not careful this year! If you are single, others find you to be very desirable. Take your time really getting to know someone. Enjoy the dating game. If you are attached, go back to those old romantic dates. You both will smile. SAG understands you at times too well for your comfort.

The Stars Show the Kind of Day You'll Have: 5-Dynamic; 4-Positive; 3-Average; 2-Soso; 1-Difficult

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19)  
\*\*\*\* Tension builds as, out of necessity, you approach a situation differently. Your willingness to go back to square one allows a better plan to evolve. Associates have many ideas -- some good, some not so good! Tonight, Detach and take another look at a situation later on.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20)  
\*\*\* A friend could create a mini revolution in your life, should you permit it to happen. This person could be an associate. Deal with this person firmly and directly, and don't take anything for granted. You might need to establish limits. Tonight: Chat and dinner.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 20)  
\*\*\*\* Your way of handling situations might be mixed. Remain calm, and let others try their way, which might not work. Sometimes experience is the only teacher in situations like this. Tonight: Listen to an offer and/or invitation.

**CANCER** (June 21-July 22)  
\*\*\*\* Don't get into the methodology. Just let go of any remnants of negativity and open up to new types of thinking. If you think outside the box, workable ideas will appear. Tonight: Make time for a special person.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22)  
\*\*\*\* Be more forthright and direct with a child or loved one. You also might have to put it on the line with a creative project. Others simply might not see eye to eye with you. Know when enough is enough. Tonight: So what if you have to work tomorrow? Enjoy living.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)  
\*\*\*\* You might want to change the path you are heading down. Investigate new possibilities, despite someone's reaction. Perhaps this person is going overboard trying to make an impression or make sure you get where he or she is coming from. Acknowledge this person's position. Still, do what you know works for you. Tonight: Could be late.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)  
\*\*\*\* Understand what is going on with a close associate, sibling or maybe even a neighbor. This person's needs could stun you or shake up your plans. You might need to think about your priorities when you make a decision. Tonight: Run errands on the way home.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)  
\*\*\*\* You are more aware of your limits than you might let on. A child or loved one could be demanding. You might need to say "no." Avoid any risk-taking right now. The end result might have you shaking your head. Tonight: Pay a bill or two.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)  
\*\*\*\* You could be taken aback by a family member's reaction. If you want to do something differently, now might be the time, especially if it involves the person who is kicking up his or her heels. Tonight: Do what you want. Claim your power!

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)  
\*\*\*\* Step back if news or an incident throws you into a tizzy. You can only control your reaction and nothing else. Knowing that, you won't get involved in a power play. Take a walk if you feel you are going to lose your temper. Tonight: Get some extra rest; you are going to need it.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)  
\*\*\*\* Zero in on what you want without getting too caught up in the costs. At a certain point, a less-expensive or more-effective way will occur if you relax and work with this goal. Tonight: With friends.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20)  
\*\*\*\* Others eye how you handle yourself. You could be in a tough situation right now, but realize that severe reactions or doing something unexpected won't help your cause. Tonight: Up late.

**BORN TODAY**  
Actress Kirstie Alley (1951), basketball player Dominique Wilkins (1960), actor Olivier Martinez (1966)

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