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Tuesday, May 20, 2008

Hit man tells how he killed Detroit cop's wife

Two men face murder trial, but husband accused of hiring them hasn't been charged.

George Hunter / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Self-professed hit man Vincent Smothers described to police the last horrifying seconds of Rose Cobb's life as she sat in the passenger seat of her minivan in the parking lot of an east side drug store.

"I broke out the window, and demanded her purse. She was screaming," Smothers said in his April 19 confession, which was read aloud Monday by Detroit Police Investigator Ira Todd during Smothers' preliminary hearing in 36th District Court.

"She was afraid. I wanted to take her purse so it wouldn't look like a contract kill, but she was panicking; moving around too much. To keep from any further delay, I shot her in the head," Smothers told police of the Dec. 26 murder. "She fell across the console toward the driver's seat."

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Cobb was shot four times in the face at close range.

Smothers, 27, and Marzell Black, 20, the man who allegedly helped set up Rose Cobb's hit, were bound over for trial Monday by 36th District Judge Mark Randon. The two men face a May 27 arraignment in 3rd Circuit Court on first-degree murder charges.

Meanwhile, Detroit Police Sgt. David Cobb, who was arrested April 20 in connection with his wife's slaying and released a day later, is still under investigation by the Police Department's Internal Affairs Unit and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Although Smothers' confession was enough for the judge to bind the case over, University of Detroit Mercy Law Professor Larry Dubin said it isn't enough to implicate Cobb.

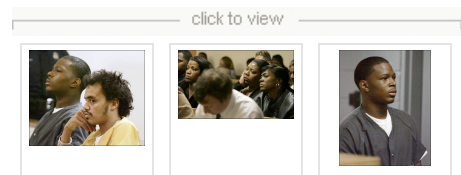
"The only way (Smothers') accusations would stand up is if he were to go into court and offer that statement under oath," Dubin said. "That way, the police officer's attorney would be able to cross-examine him about the allegations. Otherwise, to allow that statement would be a violation of (Cobb's) Sixth Amendment right (which guarantees a defendant the right to confront an accuser)."

Cobb was suspended without pay April 24 for conduct unbecoming an officer, pending the outcome of an internal affairs investigation. When he was arrested, police officials said Cobb hired Smothers to kill his wife, and that Black, the son of Cobb's girlfriend, Sheila Black, acted as a go-between in the murder plot and drove the getaway car on the night of the killing.

But Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy's office said there wasn't enough



Vincent Smothers, right, and Marzell Black are charged in Rose Cobb's killing. Smothers told police he killed 10 people for money. (Brandy Baker / The Detroit News)



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evidence to charge Cobb, and he was released from jail.

Approached at his home last week by Detroit News reporters, Cobb said, "I can't say anything except that there's a side to this that no one in the media has asked me about at all." He declined to elaborate.

Smothers told police that Black introduced him to David Cobb in November 2007. The three men met in a Coney Island restaurant on Gratiot a few weeks before the murder, Smothers told Todd, the investigator.

Cobb told Smothers during that meeting that he should expect to be questioned about the murder, Smothers said.

"He said, 'As long as they don't have the gun, they don't have nothing,' " Todd said, quoting from Smothers' statement. "He said Cobb told him five times: 'Make sure you get rid of the gun.' " Smothers also told police, "(Cobb) said I wouldn't get any less time if I said he hired me. And he said (investigators) would play good cop/bad cop to try to confuse me."

Smothers said he had no problem performing hits on drug dealers -- but the Rose Cobb killing was too much for his conscience to take.

When asked how he felt after killing the 47-year-old woman, Smothers told police, "My stomach was in knots. I thought she was innocent."

Smothers said he took on the job because he owed \$5,000 to Black. "He was on my back," Smothers said of Black.

Sheryl Gary, Rose Cobb's sister, expressed appreciation for Smothers' confession.

"I'm glad he had the conscience to come forward," she said.

Rose Cobb's niece, Adrian Gary, said she hopes David Cobb "pays for what he did. I hope he gets charged in this, too."

After Smothers was arrested in Shelby Township on April 19, police say he confessed to being a hit man who was responsible for 10 murders. Investigators say Smothers also fingered Cobb, 38, for promising to pay him \$10,000 from his wife's \$200,000 life insurance policy if he killed her.

Marzell Black also implicated Cobb in the murder for hire, police said.

Earlier Monday, Smothers was bound over by Randon in connection with the June 21, 2007, double slaying of Gaudielle Webster and Clarence Cherry on the 7000 block of Gravier. Another woman, who survived being shot during the same incident, provided police with a lead to Smothers' arrest.

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