

Murder charge dropped

Case dismissed day of trial; defendant had already spent a year in jail

By **ERIC VELASCO**
News staff writer

Orlando Lewis walked out of the Jefferson County Jail a free man Monday, after prosecutors dropped a capital murder charge against him the day his trial was scheduled to begin.

Two witnesses recanted their identification of Lewis, and the gun used to kill Michael Finner-son was found in the home of another man who had a history of violence, said Lewis' attorney, Charles Salvagio.

Finner-son, 23, was killed Dec.

28, 2005, in a drive-by shooting as he walked toward the basketball courts in the Kimbrough Homes public housing complex.

Lewis, who will turn 27 next week, has been in jail since his arrest on Jan. 17, 2006.

"I wish he would not have had to spend a year of his life in jail," Salvagio said. He planned to try the case this week with Tom Mesereau, who successfully defended Michael Jackson against child molestation charges in 2005.

The internationally prominent

Los Angeles attorney has traveled to Alabama annually since 1999 to provide free representation for murder defendants facing the death penalty.

Misty Reynolds, a deputy district attorney, told Salvagio last week the murder weapon had been found during a drug raid at another man's home, the defense attorney said.

Reynolds asked Circuit Judge Virginia Vinson on Monday to dismiss the case without prejudice, meaning the charge can be refiled against Lewis if more evidence is found. She declined

further comment Monday except to say the investigation continues.

Salvagio praised Reynolds for dismissing the case.

"I'm glad Misty was out for justice," he said.

Salvagio said his client was "a victim of Crime Stoppers," the anonymous tip line for police.

"Some person called in and said my client was the person they were looking for," Salvagio said. "But he had no motive. He didn't live in the neighborhood."

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