

Jury of peers, not teammates, will shape Cook's fate

- Football pushed far into background as his felony trial begins.

VIKINGS INSIDER
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By afternoon's end, Chris Cook stood, tugged at his suit jacket and cracked his neck – first left, then back to the right. He pushed his chair forward and stared at the courtroom ceiling for a few seconds.

This was the end of a tiring day and the beginning of a long and anx-

ious week.

To Vikings fans, one question has hovered for four months now: When, if ever, will Cook be back on the field wearing his purple No. 31 jersey?

Yet on Monday, that question carried sobering context, Cook is not just a 25-year-old cornerback hopeful for a shot at NFL redemption, but also a defendant beginning his felony trial.

A little more than 19 weeks after an argument between Cook and his girl-

friend turned violent in Eden Prairie, jury selection has begun for a case that will, in large part, determine Cook's future.

District Court File 27CRI133287: The State of Minnesota vs. Christopher O'Shea Cook.

The defendant faces two charges: domestic assault by strangulation and assault in the third degree.

On Monday, not long before lunch, Cook stood in courtroom 1653 in the Hennepin County Government Cen-

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RICHARD SENNOTT • Star Tribune
Chris Cook appeared in court Monday for jury selection.

For Cook, 12 in the jurors' box supersede 11 in defensive huddle

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ter and attentively watched 40 of his so-called peers parade in.

These were the prospective jurors, 12 of which will be selected — likely by the end of Tuesday — to consider evidence presented by the prosecution as well as Cook's defense attorneys.

Among the jurors who filed in: a law professor, a semitrailer truck driver, a bank vice president and a dialysis nurse.

Cook looked each of them over and paid close attention throughout the proceedings, his fate now being served to strangers, tied to an unnerv-

ing criminal case that should be ready for jury deliberation by early next week.

Professional football will have nothing to do with any of it.

Two sides to every story

On Monday afternoon, Juror No. 4 was excused, herself a former domestic abuse victim.

Juror No. 22 also exited after admitting on a written questionnaire that, based on what he had heard and read about the alleged crime, he couldn't be fair and impartial enough to provide Cook a presumption of innocence.

More jurors are likely to be excused Tuesday before open-

ing statements begin.

It remains to be seen, for example, what attorneys will do with the college student from Maple Grove who admitted to being a die-hard Vikings fan and hinted that, in his mind, the prosecution may start out a little behind, noting Cook's return to action would be positive for his favorite team.

"I wish he'd get us to a Super Bowl," the juror quipped.

Which quickly served as a reminder of the two very different worlds Cook is a part of. This week, the bright lights, extravagant NFL stage Cook wants to return to will take a back seat to the high stakes civics lesson he is about to re-

ceive firsthand.

The more time that has passed since Cook's incarceration in October, the easier it has been for the details of his alleged crime to fade. Now, two prosecuting attorneys will attempt to reveal Cook's alleged vicious behavior beyond a reasonable doubt. The cornerback's attorneys will assert the violence came in self-defense.

Professional football will have nothing to do with any of it.

Changing stories

During pretrial discussions Monday, the state won a motion to admit prior statements, a victory for a prosecution that

seems to be expecting the testimony from Cook's alleged victim to be different now than what she told police, detectives and doctors in the fall.

That ruling came amid revelations that the alleged victim had made recent statements that she still cares for and loves Cook.

The other major development came with the disclosure of new details from a call Cook made to his girlfriend from jail the afternoon following their altercation. In that conversation, the cornerback is said to have blamed his girlfriend for making him miss the Vikings' Week 7 game with Green Bay.

Cook's girlfriend reportedly

then apologized for reporting the strangulation to police. That's what put Cook behind bars.

So now Cook will spend the rest of this week at the same defense table, in the same courtroom downtown, as the early hours of Oct. 22 are revisited by lawyers and witnesses and assessed by the jury.

A talented young cornerback will play a distressing waiting game, the arc of his life dependent on a verdict issued by 12 strangers.

Professional football will have nothing to do with any of it.