

Monterey County The Herald

February 25, 2010
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Street garb gets OK for court

LARRY PARSONS

Jesse John Crow didn't appear in court Wednesday for 40 minutes of legal jousting in his high-profile murder case. But his physical appearance — for media cameras — was the central issue. Attorneys for the 33-year-old Prunedale man accused of murdering his wife, Ryann Bunnell Crow, 23, who vanished Jan. 30, waived his appearance, which would have put him before cameras in jail clothing.

Instead, the defense was granted a request that Crow be allowed to wear civilian clothes every time he comes to court — for pretrial hearings, as well as at trial.

Defense attorney Brian Worthington said the clothing issue was critical to protect Crow's presumption of innocence in a murder case that has garnered pervasive local media attention, as well as national coverage.

Superior Court Judge Russell Scott didn't grant a defense request that Crow be allowed in court for pretrial proceedings without shackles or restraints.

Scott said the Salinas court facility, in which many courtrooms are in portable buildings, is not secure enough to treat Crow differently from other inmates who are routinely shackled during pretrial proceedings.

"It's not exactly steel and cement," the judge, alluding to his courtroom in a portable building. Worthington argued that media images of his client in restraints would go to the same issue of presumption of innocence and take a psychological toll on Crow.

Crow has been held in the Monterey County jail in lieu of \$3million bail since he was arrested Feb. 16 by Salinas police who investigated his wife's disappearance.

Ryann Crow was last seen driving in Prunedale on Jan. 30, and her family reported her missing Feb. 2, but her body has not been found. Her car was found in a Foster City neighborhood Feb. 9.

Deputy County Counsel Traci Kirkbride argued that bringing Crow to court in civilian clothes all the time would put an undue burden on the Sheriff's Office. She strongly objected to the defense request on shackles.

The only other time such defense requests were granted was in the case of John Kenney, an elderly Carmel Valley man who murdered two neighbors over a property dispute, she said.

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Crow's appearance in jail clothing before a judge in a pretrial proceeding wouldn't prejudice the judge, Kirkbride said. As for shackles, she said, Kenney was elderly and frail while Crow is the opposite.

"From what I have seen, he seems to be in fairly good shape, and he's fairly young," she said outside court.

Crow's absence from the courtroom and the judge's ruling about his attire for future appearances short-circuited a possible showdown with several media representatives. They were on hand to contest an order by Judge Adrienne Grover at his Monday arraignment that barred media photography that would have showed Crow's orange-striped jail jumpsuit.

Outside court, Worthington said he still is concerned about images of his client in shackles, but he said that would be handled on "an appearance-by-appearance basis."

The judge set a March 3 hearing to schedule a preliminary hearing for Crow. He directed the prosecution and the defense to file briefs before then regarding pending media requests to make public now-sealed case documents, including sworn statements in support of search and arrest warrants.

Larry Parsons can be reached at 646-4379 or lparsons@montereyherald.com.