

Out of prison, attorney Clyde Bennett back in spotlight



Written by

Janice Morse

5:35 PM, May. 21, 2011

Attorney Clyde Bennett II of Mason returned to the practice of law with a bang.

Reinstated to the practice of law after a suspension and a prison term, Bennett lost none of the flashy style that helped him win a string of big-time acquittals.

Jaws dropped last week when Bennett showed up as the lawyer hired to defend Marcus Anthony Isreal, the suspect accused of murder and eight other charges in a May 10 police chase that killed Warren County sheriff's deputy Sgt. Brian Dulle.

Isreal became the first high-profile client for Bennett since he recently regained his law license after a three-year suspension and a federal prison term for a financial felony. He's determined to rebuild his once-robust law practice.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be back in court, representing people who are

accused. I feel like this is my personal calling - this is what God intended me to do," Bennett says. "I'm elated."

Ironically, Bennett faced off against a former colleague in the Isreal case: new Warren County Prosecutor David Fornshell. Both men had been partners at the Cincinnati law firm of Dinsmore & Shohl; now they're courtroom adversaries in a huge case.

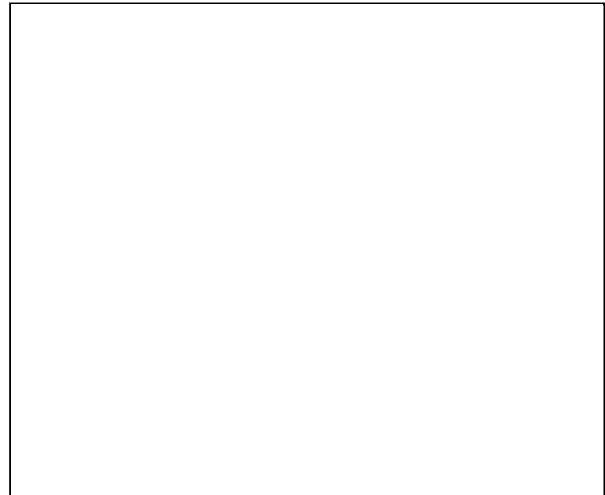
"The irony is not lost on me," Fornshell said. "But it certainly does not impact in any way the way we're going to proceed on this case."

Still, Fornshell was taken aback when he learned Bennett was representing Isreal.

"I thought, 'Wow, he's certainly going to let everybody know that he's back practicing law with a big splash,' " Fornshell said.

The showdown between Fornshell and Bennett could prove interesting because the men have such different demeanors,

Advertisement



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

prosecutor and current criminal defense lawyer. Allen also was affiliated with Dinsmore & Shohl in the past.

"Clyde is in-your-face, kind of," Allen said. "David's a little more laid-back, but I've heard he's a good trial lawyer."

The stage was set for Bennett to burst back onto the local law scene April 29, when the Ohio Supreme Court reinstated his law license.

Soon after, Bennett paid a visit to Hamilton County Common Pleas Judge Norbert Nadel to tell him he was back in action.

"He's one of the best trial lawyers I've ever seen," Nadel said.

The judge described Bennett as bright, astute and passionate about his work, adding, "He's somewhat of a throwback to the more flamboyant lawyers of the past."

Bennett's loud voice and aggressive style can rub some people the wrong way. But the tall, lean lawyer makes no apologies for his courtroom swagger - and he says it's backed up by "proven results," victories touted on his website, clydebennettthelaw.com.

He does, however, regret making mistakes that cost him his livelihood - and, for a time, his freedom.

After growing up poor in Cincinnati-area housing projects, Bennett had ascended to prominence as he scored a string of

in high-profile criminal cases.

While Allen was prosecutor from 1999-2005, he saw Bennett work with "bad facts" - damning, abundant evidence - but often walk away with good results for his clients.

"He'd win cases that he'd have no business winning, because he's such a good trial lawyer," Allen said.

That success attracted a lot of buzz, a lot of clients - and fat paychecks for Bennett.

It all came crashing down in 2007.

Bennett got busted for the way he deposited \$124,000 in 2002-03.

Federal authorities launched an investigation, dropped it, then reopened the probe in 2007 and prosecuted Bennett.

He went to federal prison for 18 months - from February 2008 until May 2009 - after

his deposits into small chunks, less than \$10,000. Thus he avoided the threshold amount that requires banks to report deposits to the federal government. Those reporting rules were set up to help federal officials detect illegal activity that might be connected to large sums of money. Bennett says all the money he deposited was legally earned income.

His explanation: Leery of banks, Bennett had socked away dough for years. The amount grew so large, he felt uncomfortable holding onto it. He also wanted to make a down payment on his house. But he didn't want to arouse suspicion by depositing such a large sum, fearing he'd be targeted for his zealous criminal defense work.

Bennett says he knew it was wrong to purposely avoid making deposits exceeding \$10,000. He said he'd change things if he could do it over again: "I would have gone down to the bank with a duffel bag full of the \$124,000, slapped it down and said, 'Here, go ahead - investigate.'"

In recommending Bennett for reinstatement, an Ohio lawyer-discipline board wrote: "He has taken full responsibility for his actions and expressed complete remorse and shame for his misconduct."

Jonathan Coughlan, Supreme Court disciplinary counsel, said attorneys convicted of felonies are sometimes reinstated, as Bennett was.

said, "so there is no flat rule that if you do 'X,' you can never practice law again."

"Everybody deserves a second chance; he's got the second chance now," Nadel said

practice murder charges. Over the course of the trial, Jackson's lawyer argued that Jackson was a man and one for her fetus - after concluding he fired in self-defense during an argument with another man. The shot missed Jackson's target and hit Tawnia Kirksey, who was 10 weeks pregnant. The verdict stunned prosecutors, who had argued that Jackson meant to kill the other man, Eli Wheeler, and did not fear for his life.

2006: The two people accused of killing 1-year-old Jamira Chenault of Forest Park were acquitted in separate Hamilton County trials. The Forest Park toddler died of a head injury in December 2004. Her two caregivers, cousins of her mother, were accused

Bennett represented both defendants who were found not guilty, Johnathan and Takola Glover.

2006: Anthony McClain of O'Bryonville, in prison for 11 years before being granted a new trial, was acquitted of murder after being retried for the 1995 killing of 17-year-old Phillip White in Evanston.

2005: A Hamilton County jury acquitted Betty Thomas of Westwood on a charge of murder in the August 2004 shooting of Grady A. Madison. Prosecutors had alleged Thomas lured Madison away from a group of friends in Springfield Township to rob him. At trial, three officers and four eyewitnesses testified to the shooting. At the time Bennett said jurors told him "there was doubt to what all seven (witnesses) said."

2005: A Butler County jury acquitted a Springfield Township teenager, Adrian Reynolds, of murder and convicted him of the lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter in the beating death of a 17-year-old Fairfield boy. Reynolds was charged in 2004 with murder while he was 16 years old after authorities found Brandon Mitchell beaten to death behind a Fairfield apartment complex. Prosecutors contended that Reynolds started the fight, punching and kicking Mitchell several times while he was on the ground until he was unconscious. Bennett argued that Mitchell started the fight.

2002: Bridget Stovall was found not guilty by reason of insanity in the 2001 drowning of her two children in a saltwater bath in Hamilton County. She had faced a potential death sentence, but instead was ordered to undergo mental treatment.

CINCINNATI!.com

Enquirer archives

Deputy's ring found in 90 minutes

Ring-finders to be honored in deputy death case

Bond now \$2M for suspect in deputy's death

Officer's widow gets his wedding ring back

Warren County deputy buried

A deputy who loved doing his job

Suspect indicted for murder in death of Warren Co. deputy

Hundreds remember fallen Warren County officers

\$1M bond for suspect in crash that killed Warren County deputy

Fallen Warren County sergeant's funeral services set

Suspect identified in death of Warren County officer

Dulle remembered fondly in Warren County

Butler Co. will review 'Stop Stick' use

Warren County sergeant killed in chase