

Stain of friend's drowning will remain on record

04/22/04

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Judge won't wipe away ex-officer's conviction

Former Metro Officer William Bishop, who caused the drowning of a fellow officer when his speeding car ran into the Cumberland River, is not entitled to have his criminal record eventually wiped clean, a judge ruled yesterday.

Allowing Bishop to walk away with a cleared record would denigrate the seriousness of causing the death of Officer Paul Cleveland, Davidson County Criminal Court Judge Steve Dozier said in a written opinion.

The judge also wrote that Bishop should be held to a higher standard because he was a police officer at the time of the Madison accident.

"The Court has before it a police officer who consumed two-thirds of a pitcher of beer and got behind the wheel of his car with other police officers and sped down the roadways of Davidson County, endangering the life of the occupants and the other citizens on the road," Dozier wrote.

Allowing Bishop to have his record expunged would have a "deterrent effect on the general public, especially police officers who may think about breaking the law or believe that they are above reproach by the criminal justice system."

Dozier said this was not, as Bishop's lawyer argued, an isolated incident of speeding and reckless driving. Bishop had testified that he was in an "unofficial competition" with Cleveland to see how fast each could drive.

At a sentencing hearing earlier this month, Bishop testified that he was seeking to outdo his friend when he lost control of his vehicle on Howse Avenue on Sept. 6. Bishop's 2004 Pontiac Grand Prix nose-dived into the river.

Inside were Bishop, Cleveland and Officer Cody O'Quinn. Bishop and O'Quinn got out of the submerged vehicle through a sunroof. Cleveland drowned.

Bishop was sentenced to five years probation on two felony charges. Cleveland's family did not want him to go to prison but said they felt the charges should remain on his record.