

## 2 convicted of killing wrangler

□ Two men are found guilty of manslaughter in a bar fight that left an alligator wrangler dead.

By Henry Pierson Curtis

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

KISSIMMEE — Two men were convicted Friday night of manslaughter in the killing of Gatorland alligator wrangler Trevor Lakin.

Charged with second-degree murder, Steve Bass, 33, and Adam Hammond, 24, were found guilty of the lesser charge after three days of testimony about a fatal, drunken brawl last fall at the Oak Rail bar in Intercession City.

"We thought all along it was going to be murder two," Lakin's father, John, said after the verdict. "It's just one of those things; you don't know what the jury is going to do."

Lakin was killed Nov. 1 outside the bar on South Orange Blossom Trail. Questions about how he died persisted throughout the three-day trial.

The prosecution charged that Hammond knocked Lakin down, breaking the alligator wrangler's skull and that Bass finished him off with repeated kicks to the head.

Regardless of who delivered the fatal blow, Assistant State Attorney Joseph Micetich said Bass and Hammond were equally responsible for Lakin's death. When two people commit a crime together each is responsible for the other's acts, he said.

Under state sentencing guidelines, both men face up to seven years in state prison, Micetich told Lakin's parents and co-workers from Gatorland, a tourist attrac-

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## Defense lawyers say victim started brawl

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tion on Orange Blossom Trail.

"That means they'll see their sons in five to seven years," Lakin's mother, Judy, said of the parents of Bass and Hammond. "We'll never see our son again."

Throughout the trial, Scott Gold and Richard Swaine, the defendants' attorneys, argued that no crime was committed. They said the death was a tragic accident and that Lakin was partly responsible because he started the brawl.

Witnesses said Hammond threw only one punch — after Lakin

punched or pushed his girlfriend to the ground during the brawl.

Throughout the trial, witnesses cited heavy drinking as possibly having fueled the brawl. When it erupted, spectators cheered on the fighting hoping it would last longer, one witness said.

Lakin's cause of death was listed as "closed-head trauma due to a beating," by the Orange-Osceola Medical Examiner's Office.

Dr. Jesse Giles, who performed the autopsy, was unable to say during testimony Thursday which blow killed Lakin. Death was the combined result of several injuries, he said.

The fracture at the base of Lakin's skull was consistent with having been knocked backward and down against the pavement by Hammond's punch, Giles said. But, Giles also said, the injury could have happened earlier when Lakin and Bass were rolling on the pavement, punching each other.

Lakin's intoxication at a blood-alcohol level of 0.17 percent may have worsened his head injury, but he would not have survived it whether or not he was drinking, Giles said.

Bass and Hammond will be sentenced Nov. 24.