

Teen convicted of slaying girl on prom night

By WILLIAM RYBERG

Of The Register's Davenport Bureau

DAVENPORT, IA. — Jeffery Lee Hass of Cedar Rapids was convicted Wednesday afternoon of first-degree murder in the prom-night slaying of a high school girl last spring.

Hass, 19, bowed his head and closed his eyes as the verdict was read. He appeared to be crying as he was led from the courtroom later.

Hass was charged in the May 7 death of Leah Michelle Wara, 17, of Hiawatha, whose partly clothed body was found in his apartment about 1½ days after she was seen leaving a post-prom party with him. She had been strangled.

Wara's mother, Linda Sorenson, fought tears as she sat in the front row of the spectators' area with her husband, Keith Sorenson, Wara's stepfather, as the verdict was read.

"We just wanted justice to be done," Linda Sorenson said.

A Scott County jury of six men and six women returned the verdict about 4 p.m. after deliberating 11 hours over two days. The case was reported extensively in Linn County and was transferred here for trial.

Hass was accused of strangling Wara with a necktie and his hands. Wara, a senior at Kennedy High School in Cedar Rapids, had gone to her senior prom the night of May 6 with another young man but later accompanied Hass to a party.

Evidence included a tape-recorded confession in which Hass admitted strangling Wara after having sex with her.