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### Coles guilty

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Rap music impresario Alton "Ace Capone" **Coles** was convicted yesterday of using **his record** company as a **front** for a multimillion dollar **drug**-distribution network that brought more than a ton of cocaine and a half-ton of crack onto the Philadelphia market between 1998 and August 2005.

Five other defendants, including Timothy "Tim Gotti" Baukman, **Coles'** business partner and cofounder of Take Down Records, were also **found guilty** by a U.S. District Court jury after nearly seven days of deliberations.

"This kind of crime is literally evil," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Lloret, who prosecuted the **case**. **Coles'** network, prosecutors allege, was responsible for putting 100,000 doses of crack per week on city streets.

**In** all, the jury of eight women and four men delivered **guilty** verdicts **in** 123 of the 137 criminal counts contained **in** the **case**. **Coles**, 34, was convicted of 37 of the 43 charges **he** faced, including conspiracy **to** distribute cocaine and heading a continuing criminal enterprise.

**He faces** a mandatory **life** sentence, according **to** federal prosecutors.

The verdicts capped a six-week trial that included testimony from **drug** dealers, investigators and **Coles** himself, who spent nearly six hours over two days on the witness stand denying the allegations.

Lloret, who prosecuted the **case** along with Michael Bresnick, called the verdicts "gratifying."

Lloret, a veteran prosecutor who has won convictions against several notorious **drug** kingpins, said the charges underscored the kind of impact **drug** dealing has on the city's neighborhoods.

"There are neighborhoods **in** Philadelphia that are just degraded by crack and cocaine," **he** said. "We're glad we did something positive."

**Coles** showed little emotion during the 50 minutes it took the jury forewoman **to** deliver the verdicts **in** the **case**. **He** sat quietly at the defense table, occasionally conferring with **his** attorney, Christopher Warren.

"**He** was kind of stoic," Warren said afterward. "We were prepared for it. But until the jury announces its verdict, there's always hope."

Warren said **Coles** had no second thoughts about testifying. The extensive use of wiretaps **in** the **case** - more than 1,000 conversations were recorded during the investigation and more than 300 were played for the jury - required **Coles to** speak, Warren said. Prosecutors alleged that the tapes showed **Coles** and **his** associates setting up and carrying out **drug** deals.

The only way **to** overcome the wiretap evidence, Warren said, was for **Coles to** get up there and explain what **he** meant" **in** the conversations played for the jury.

The onetime barber from Darby was soft-spoken and articulate on the witness stand. But **his** explanations - **he** knew **drug** dealers, but was not a dealer himself; **he** generated income from both legitimate and illegitimate sources, but not from cocaine trafficking - apparently fell flat.

Yesterday's convictions capped a detailed investigation by a task force set up under the federally funded Philadelphia-Camden High Intensity **Drug** Trafficking Area program. The probe



was headed by agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and included IRS agents and narcotics detectives with the Philadelphia Police Department.

Before **his** arrest **in** August 2005, **Coles** was well known on Philadelphia's rap music scene, staging weekly parties at clubs, hosting after-concert parties for rap stars who performed **in** the city, and promoting CDs and DVDs featuring rappers who performed for Take Down Records.

**He** drove around the city **in** a blue Bentley that **he** obtained **in** a trade - for a Cadillac Escalade and a Mercedes-Benz - with local rap star Beanie Sigel.

And **he** "starred" **in** a 31-minute rap music video called New Jack City: The Next Generation that investigators said underlined **Coles'** audacious, **in**-your-face attitude. The video, which was played for the jury, told the story of a Southwest Philadelphia **drug** ring that **used** violence, intimidation and murder **to** take over crack distribution.

**Coles** and Baukman played the roles of **drug** kingpins **in** the video, which, authorities alleged, was an example of art imitating **life**. Prosecutors contended that at the time the video was produced **in** 2003, **Coles** and Baukman had, **in** fact, taken over crack distribution **in** the same Southwest Philadelphia neighborhoods where the video was made.

Evidence at trial included testimony from more than 40 witnesses, including two admitted **drug** dealers who said they routinely bought kilogram quantities of cocaine from the **Coles** network.

The jury was also shown drugs seized during the investigation and 30 weapons and more than \$800,000 **in** cash confiscated during raids on Aug. 5, 2005.

**A** former girlfriend of **Coles'**, Kristina Latney, also testified for the prosecution, admitting that **Coles used** her **as** a straw buyer for properties and luxury automobiles purchased with **drug** proceeds.

Latney was one of five women linked romantically **to** **Coles** during the trial.

Two other girlfriends, Asya Richardson, 27, and Monique Pullins, 24, were codefendants. They were convicted of related charges yesterday.

Pullins, whose bail was denied after the verdicts were announced, was convicted of the most serious crime: conspiracy **to** distribute cocaine. She **faces** a sentence of from 10 years **to** **life**. She was also convicted of maintaining a stash house where **Coles** kept drugs, and of using the telephone for **drug** trafficking.

Richardson was convicted of two counts of money laundering **in** connection with the purchase of a \$488,000 house near Mullica Hill that she shared with **Coles** for just two weeks before **his** arrest **in** August 2005.

Authorities charged that **Coles used drug** proceeds **as** a down payment for the luxury house.

James Morris, 33, a reputed **drug** supplier, was convicted of conspiracy **to** distribute cocaine. Like **Coles** and Baukman, **he** **faces** a **life** sentence.

**His** girlfriend, Thais Thompson, 32, was convicted of two counts of perjury but acquitted of three other related charges.

When agents raided Thompson's home outside Salem, N.J., where Morris was staying on Aug. 5, 2005, they **found** \$559,321 **in** cash stashed throughout the house.

Thompson was convicted of lying **to** a grand jury about the source of that money and about the source of a \$25,000 cash payment made **to** a defense attorney.

She and Richardson remain free on bail.

**As** she left the courthouse yesterday afternoon, Thompson, who has three children with Morris, said, "Now I have **to** go home and explain **to** my kids their father won't be coming home."

Judge R. Barclay Surrick set sentencings **in** the **case** for the week of June 9.

**In** all, 22 defendants were indicted **in** the **case**. Six have have pleaded **guilty**. The others are awaiting trial.

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