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# Former Volusia Beach Patrol officer enters plea; will get prison in underage sex case

BY CHRIS GRAHAM AND JAY STAPLETON, STAFF WRITERS

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DAYTONA BEACH -- A former Volusia County Beach Patrol officer will be sent to a state prison after pleading no contest to charges of having sex with an underage lifeguard and a teenager, according to a three-page plea agreement filed Thursday.

Robert Tameris, also known to his peers as "Beautiful Bobby," entered a plea of no contest to two charges of unlawful sexual activity with a minor, according to the documents. The plea marks another chapter in a scandal that rocked the Beach Patrol, leading to the firings of three employees and a lawsuit against the county.



Bobby Tameris sits in court during a Jan. 3 hearing at the Justice Center in Daytona Beach. (N-J | David Tucker)

The 46-year-old Tameris will be adjudicated guilty and spend 18 months in state prison, to be followed by four years of strict sex offender probation, the agreement shows. In the document, Tameris said he "maintains my innocence," and is pleading to the charges in his "best interest."

Tameris, who has been out on \$20,000 bail, will be designated a sex offender once his sentence is completed. If Tameris violates the terms of his probation, he could also spend more time in prison.

Tameris' attorney, Mike Lambert, said there is an agreement between the state and defense not to discuss the plea agreement in the media.

"I will honor that," he said, declining further comment.

But State Attorney R.J. Larizza said in a news release that Tameris' pending sentence will make the community a "safer and better place."

"Sometimes the pursuit of justice is an arduous and painful journey, as it was in this case," he said.

Tameris answered the door at his Port Orange home on Thursday but declined comment.

For Tameris it culminates a nearly three-year firestorm after allegations surfaced in 2009 that he was among three men who had sex with former lifeguard Ashley Drury, who was a minor at the time.

The county launched an internal investigation after Drury alleged she had sex with Beach Patrol officers Tameris, the then 36-year-old Jecoa Simmons and 31-year-old lifeguard Chris Duarte.

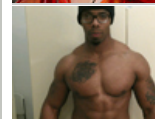
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Simmons, a captain who was fired after the allegations arose, was sentenced to four years' probation last week for telling a young woman to lie to investigators about sexual activity within the agency. Duarte was never prosecuted.

Affidavits filed with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement alleged Drury had sex with each of the men at various times in 2008.

The affidavits show Tameris and the former lifeguard exchanged more than 1,700 text messages during an undetermined amount of time and more than 1,100 texts with the two other men.

Tameris was not initially charged due to a lack of sufficient evidence. Simmons and Duarte were never charged with any sex crime.

But after Drury's claims surfaced, a teenager told investigators she had a sexual relationship with Tameris after she met him while sunbathing. She said the pair had sex 20 to 25 times between September 2007 and May 2008 at Tameris' home when she was 16 and 17.

Drury later filed a federal lawsuit against the county for condoning a "culture of sexual abuse and depravity" and demanded more than \$2 million in damages. The lawsuit has since been dismissed and she could be on the hook for nearly \$300,000 the county spent defending itself in federal court.

A similar suit is pending in state court.

County officials did not return a message left Thursday and Drury's attorney Brett Hartley declined comment.

The criminal case against Tameris dragged along with numerous delays after he was arrested in 2009. The case was expected to go to trial next week, and would have taken five days. If convicted at trial of both counts, Tameris faced a minimum sentence of 11 1/2 years in prison.

Tameris had recently argued that the case should be dismissed on a number of legal grounds, but his motions were denied by Circuit Judge Joseph Will.

The judge had agreed to suppress some evidence, including phone records and text messages. But he denied other efforts by the defense to weaken the state's case, which was largely based on the credibility of witnesses.

Under Florida law, it is a felony for a person 24 and older to have sex with a person who is 16 or 17, regardless of whether the sex was consensual.

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