

Dad exonerated in baby's killing, guilty in assault

BY KRISTEN DELGUZZI

The Cincinnati Enquirer

Four months ago, Lance Snedegar pleaded guilty to killing one infant daughter and abusing another. On Monday, three months after withdrawing the plea, he was acquitted of the most serious charge against him.

After more than five hours of deliberation over two days, jurors found Mr. Snedegar not guilty of involuntary manslaughter in the September 1995 death of 59-day-old Chelsea. He also was found not guilty of assaulting Chelsea.

But he was convicted of felonious assault for breaking 12 of 25-day-old Haley's ribs in August 1996. He faces a maximum of eight years in prison when he is sentenced Wednesday by Judge John O'Connor of Hamilton County Common Pleas Court.

Mr. Snedegar, 24, of Norwood, wept when the verdicts were read.

"Lance started crying and was upset when they said, 'Not guilty,'" defense attorney Jay Clark said. "He was the same way when they said, 'Guilty.' I know he was adamant when he said he didn't hurt either of these children."

Mr. Snedegar rescinded the plea in October to take advantage of an appeals court decision that makes a portion of Ohio's new sentencing law retroactive. Under the new law, he faced a shorter maximum sentence.

During the weeklong trial, Mr. Clark argued that two of



the girls' caregivers — their mother, Heidi, and maternal grandmother, Vicki Peterson — were more likely culprits in the case.

Ms. Peterson, L. Snedegar he said, has a documented history of abuse, including assaults against her daughter and another grandchild.

Police and prosecutors argued that Mr. Snedegar had abused both girls in the same way: by squeezing them. They claimed he admitted to the crimes in a tape-recorded interview. Mr. Clark said investigators twisted his client's words.

Jurors, who could not be reached, apparently did not believe Mr. Snedegar confessed to killing Chelsea, whose death originally was ruled Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. After Haley was rushed to the hospital, the cause of death in Chelsea's case was amended to homicide, although doctors could find no visible signs of trauma.

Mr. Clark argued the same thing could not have happened to both girls, since Haley had numerous and visible injuries, including broken bones and bruising.

"I'm happy that they found him not guilty of the manslaughter of Chelsea," Mr. Clark said. "I'm just disappointed that they found him guilty of the felonious assault of Haley when two much more violent people were caretakers (of her)."

Attorney: Wrong person charged

Trial opens in death of baby, abuse of another

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Lance Snedegar was not the only person in contact with his two baby girls before they stopped breathing, but he was the only one investigated by police and he is the only one facing criminal charges.

In opening statements Tuesday in Mr. Snedegar's trial, defense attorney Jay Clark told jurors there are more likely culprits in the 1995 death of 59-day-old Chelsea and the 1996 assault of 25-day-old Haley.

"There is a common denominator to all the suffering, and it was not Lance," Mr. Clark said. "It was (grandmother) Vicki Peterson and her daughter, Heidi (the girls' mother)."

Mr. Clark said Ms. Peterson, who was the caregiver of both girls, has a documented history of abusing Heidi and another grandchild.

Gus Leon, an assistant Hamilton County prosecutor, did not address the allegations during his opening statement before Common Pleas Judge John O'Connor. But he told jurors about what he described as incriminating comments Mr. Snedegar made to police.

"On tape, you will hear him admit it two different times — from his own mouth — how he killed Chelsea and how he feloniously assaulted Haley a year later," Mr. Leon said.

Mr. Snedegar, 25, of Norwood, is charged with involuntary manslaughter and two counts of felonious assault. Prosecutors say he squeezed and struck both girls.

Chelsea's death originally was ruled sudden infant death syndrome because she showed no signs of injury or abuse. It was amended to homicide last year, after Haley was found not breathing, with broken ribs, bruises and evidence of possible strangulation or smothering. She has recovered.

Mr. Snedegar pleaded guilty last year to the charges, but he rescinded the plea in October to take advantage of an appeals court decision that makes a portion of Ohio's new sentencing law retroactive. Under the new law, the maximum sentence he faces — 18 years in prison — is 15 years shorter than the maximum sentence under the old law.