

Nichols juror shows up late, gets 10 days in jail

90 people qualify to be in final round of jury selection

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The slow grind of jury pool selection in the Brian Nichols trial got a dose of drama Friday when a juror lied about being late for jury duty and was sentenced to 10 days in jail.

A clearly annoyed Superior Court Judge James Bodiford sentenced the young prospective juror to Fulton County jail after she admitted she had lied that she was late because she took her child to the hospital.

Dontra Heard, 34, a resident of southwest Atlanta, was handcuffed and taken to jail Friday afternoon. At the end of jury selection Friday, Nichols defense attorney Henderson Hill requested that Bodiford “show mercy” on the juror.

“Seems to me like you’ve got enough on your plate not to worry about her,” Bodiford said, going on to explain he would have shown leniency if Heard hadn’t lied and shown “disrespect” for the court.

Bodiford said if the incident had happened in Cobb County, where Bodiford normally serves on the bench, instead of Fulton County, where he was specially appointed to handle the Nichols trial, “she might have gotten 20 days.”

Bodiford found Heard guilty of contempt of court after she refused to answer detailed questions about taking her daughter to the hospital.

He told the juror he was about to sentence her — “this is a very important stage” — and asked her, again, if she was telling the truth about taking her daughter to the hospital.

“She was sick,” Heard admitted. “But I didn’t go to the hospital with [her].”

“I’m going to give you 10 days in the common jail of Fulton County,” Bodiford said, ordering her into custody.

That drama overshadowed the bigger news of the day.

After 32 days of interviewing more than 240 jurors, some for more than an hour, late Friday afternoon the final two jurors were qualified, bringing the total in the jury pool to 90.