

Beat: Sports

Blade Runner; Oscar Pistorius to start mental evaluation next

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USPA News - South African Paralympic athlete Oscar Pistorius on Tuesday was ordered to start his month-long mental evaluation next week to determine whether he was criminally responsible when he shot dead his model girlfriend on Valentine's Day last year. Judge Thokozile Masipa said Pistorius must report to Pretoria's Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital, one of the country's top mental institutions, as an outpatient next Monday to start a mental evaluation that may take up to 30 days.

She also postponed the star athlete's murder trial until June 30. "A psychiatrist [will] inquire into whether the accused, by reason of mental illness, or mental defect, was at the time of the commission of the offense criminally responsible for the offenses charged, whether he was capable of appreciating the wrongfulness of his act, or of acting in accordance with an appreciation of the wrongfulness of his act," the judge said. Masipa said Pistorius must be at Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital at 9 a.m. on Monday and must return every day as an outpatient. The mental evaluation was ordered last week after a forensics psychiatrist called by the defense team, Dr. Merryll Vorster, said her evidence suggested that Pistorius is hyper-vigilant and has been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). She said Pistorius had a "long history" of the disorder, which has been recognized for decades. Speaking at the trial last week, the judge said "the evidence of Dr. Vorster has not been contradicted nor can it be in the absence of other psychiatric evidence." Since only two interviews were conducted and Vorster had "very little time to compile her report," a proper investigation would allow for Pistorius to get a fair trial, she said. After last week's order for the star athlete to undergo a mental evaluation, Pistorius' uncle, Arnold Pistorius, expressed the family's confidence with Judge Masipa's commitment in creating a fair trial. "It reaffirms our confidence in South Africa's justice system," he told reporters. Masipa had already recognized that the mental evaluation would inevitably mean more delays for the high-profile murder trial, but said "this is not about anyone's convenience but rather about if justice has been served." Pistorius is facing trial at the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria on charges of premeditated murder and reckless use of a firearm in public in connection with the shooting death of his girlfriend, 29-year-old Reeva Steenkamp, on Valentine's Day 2013. The famed athlete denies the charges, insisting the fatal shooting of his girlfriend was accidental. During a court hearing after the shooting, Pistorius claimed he had shot Steenkamp after confusing her with an intruder he believed was inside the house, but prosecutors have accused the athlete of deliberately killing his girlfriend. On February 22, 2013, Pistorius was freed on bail set at an estimated \$100,000. At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, Pistorius participated as the first double-leg amputee to ever compete in the Olympics. He took part in the men's 400m and 4X400m relay races.

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