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## John Robert Ballard remains at a state prison

RAIFORD, Fla. (AP) -- John Robert Ballard was set free from death row after the state Supreme Court ruled there was insufficient evidence to convict him of killing two friends but he didn't rush out of prison Friday at the first opportunity to savor his freedom.

Ballard, who was expected to be released Friday afternoon and reportedly had a bus ticket home, remained at the Union Correctional Institution in Raiford hours after prison officials said he was free to go.

What was the holdup?

"When people are released from prison, sometimes they have to wait on their ride," Department of Corrections spokesman Robby Cunningham said. "It's very common that there's not someone at the front door the second they walk out."

Ballard decided to wait for a relative to pick him up from the prison rather than riding a bus back home to Naples.

But a sister who said she was driving from Marco Island to pick him up told the Associated Press Friday evening that Ballard may have to spend another night in prison.

The sister, who identified herself as Karen and declined to give her last name when reached on her cell phone, said that she expected to pick Ballard up Saturday around noon.

Ballard, 37, had served nearly three years for the 1999 murders of Jennifer Jones and Willie Ray Patin Jr. at their apartment, even though there was little to connect him to the slayings of his friends.

The Supreme Court ordered Ballard acquitted Thursday, overruling a jury's verdict, saying there wasn't sufficient proof.

Ballard's conviction had been based almost entirely on the discovery of one fingerprint and arm hair being found in the victims' Collier County apartment - a place he had visited numerous times.

Collier County prosecutors said Friday they felt the circumstantial evidence against Ballard was strong enough for a conviction.

"We convinced the jury beyond a reasonable doubt of his guilt in both murders, we got past the judgment of acquittal, and the judge obviously found the verdict was proper because he went on and sentenced him to death," said Randall McGruther, chief assistant state attorney.

McGruther declined to comment on whether police and prosecutors will pursue charges against Ballard in other crimes or keep him under surveillance.

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