THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT

REX

v

DINO DONALDSON

SENTENCING REMARKS

Preliminary matters

I have considered the Sentencing Children and Young people guideline, Sentencing Offenders with Mental Disorders Guideline as well as section 322(2) of the Sentencing Act 2020 and paragraph 5A of Schedule 21 of that act

I have read a Pre-Sentence report and a letter from a care worker Ms Tharpe. I ordered a psychiatric report to assess you and adjourned an earlier hearing in order for it to be prepared. It has not been served on your instructions, and I have had sight of no part of it.

I have considered sentencing notes from Pros and defence and heard statements of the impact of this offending on the family of Anojan Gnaneswaran.

Victim surcharge applies

I have informed the defence earlier today that I accept the Prosecution submissions on the starting point for the minimum term.

You may remain seated.

1. Dino Donaldson, just after midnight on 9th January 2024, you murdered Anojan Gnaneswaran with a knife. This happened on Platform 2 at Strawberry Hill railway station in South London. He was just 21.

2. The court has heard the impact of the murder of Anojan Gnaneswaran's on his family. These statements have been read on the family's behalf and are heartbreaking.

3. Anojan was clearly an exceptional son and brother, a role model for his siblings and the much-cherished eldest child of the family. His absence continues to be felt in countless small and deeply personal ways. Anojan is described as academically gifted, diligent and driven. Yet the details his family remember most are the everyday moments: a young man who encouraged his brother to complete his university degree when he wanted to give up; who was the first person his brothers turned to for advice; who spoke truthfully, worked hard, helped his father unload deliveries at the family business and remained devoted to his family. On the day he died, his mother had

prepared his favourite meal and expected him to return home later that evening. He never did.

4. I note the restraint and trauma in Ashwin's statement and how he struggles to describe the deep pain he feels. His brother was stabbed to death in front of him. He has now given evidence twice about the events of that night.

5. Ashwin's devotion to his brother was apparent from everything he did that night. Having seen Anojan fatally stabbed he rushed to his aid and would not give up performing resuscitation even after he knew his brother had stopped breathing. He finds himself still searching for his brother to this day.

6. Behind this confrontation is a background of possession and supply of Class A drugs, matters which resulted in a number of criminal charges and pleas by those involved, including you.

7. An initial interaction between your group at the station and Anojan developed into a confrontation after his brother and friends came to the scene. Tensions began to rise. The jury saw CCTV of both groups' movements around the station. By the time of the encounter on Platform 2, members of your group were being challenged and asked to identify themselves. The jury saw a photograph taken by one of the victim's group from seconds before the stabbing. What had begun as an

unpleasant encounter between two groups of young men rapidly descended into violent chaos and death. The jury's verdict establishes that the confrontation fundamentally changed in nature when you, no doubt enraged by being asked to identify yourself, produced a knife from your waistband.

8. Within moments of that photo having been taken, Anojan Gnaneswaran had sustained multiple stab wounds from which he would die, there on the tracks. His brother and friends witnessed this unfolding and whilst these events lasted only seconds, the consequences are permanent and devastating

9. Ashvin Gnaneswaran described seeing you draw out the weapon from your waistband as did Jude Longstaff-Montereggi. Marvin Maci saw you lunge multiple times. Panic followed. People can be seen on the CCTV scattering in different directions.

10. You didn't just use the knife to scare people away. In those moments you took the deliberate decision to use that knife on another human being. You lunged at Anojan Gnaneswaran, stabbing him. You didn't stop there and leave when he could not possibly have been any danger to you whatsoever. He went down onto the tracks and you followed. Ashvin Gnaneswaran described looking back and seeing his

brother with you after him. His brother had fallen down on the tracks and was defenceless on the ground. He saw you deliver a deliberate stab to Anojan's chest. I consider that the final blow to Anojan's chest demonstrates that in those moments you intended to kill him with that knife.

11. Anojan Gnaneswaran sustained two significant stab wounds, one to the right side of the chest and the other to the right flank and abdomen. The fatal chest wound was a deep penetrating injury cutting his ribs and into his heart. 12.5 cms deep.

12. The second was inflicted to his lower right flank and abdomen. It penetrated deeply through muscle and into the lower right chest cavity, cutting a rib and damaging his lung and kidney. The pathologist concluded that the nature of this wound suggested movement of the knife during the infliction of the injury, with partial withdrawal and reinsertion of the blade. The depth of penetration was estimated to be between 12.5 and 13.5 centimeters.

13. In addition, there was a superficial stab injury to the inner aspect of the left knee.

14. There were no defence injuries indicating that Anojan had no time to react or defend himself against the knife. All the evidence was of a sudden, lethal burst of violence.

15. Whilst others sought help for a mortally wounded young man, you fled the scene and disposed of evidence. The Crown case was that the murder weapon was later recovered concealed in a tree and that items associated with it were discarded along your escape route.

16. You have never accepted responsibility for killing your victim and to the Probation officer sought to cast blame, as was done at trial, on his brother and others. You have shown no remorse. The PSR makes it clear you are deep in denial.

17. I also sentence you for possession of a bladed article and conspiracy to possess Class A drugs.

18. I find, on the evidence, that you brought the knife, to the scene of this crime. This means that by law the calculation of the minimum term starts at 25 years. Then I assess what makes the crime even more serious and then any circumstances that might assist you in reducing the term.

19. What makes this murder more serious is the fact that it took place in a public railway station at night and members of the public where in the vicinity at the outset though thankfully not involved or witnessing the violence. After the stabbing you made off and disposed of evidence. You were on bail at the time for class A drugs offences. During the course of two trials you have tried to blame the victim's brother and continue to do so and other people and have accepted no responsibility whatsoever.

20. I will announce separate sentences in relation to the other matters and note that the knife offence is already reflected in the minimum tariff and do not double count this as another aggravating feature.

21. I do take into account that you were being pressured at the time you produced the knife, thought that pressure quickly disappeared when everyone fled after you produced the knife. I do not consider this was a premeditated murder.

22. You are still young, 19 at the time of the offence and 22 now. I have not seen you give evidence, I have read the PSR and heard submissions.

23. The experienced author of the PSR described you as presenting as a mature young man. It was also said that your level of psychosocial maturity would benefit from some exploration and development. You gave a full account to the author including of your background and circumstances. I have not seen you give evidence. Previous mental health issues were also identified in the Pre-sentence report. I therefore commissioned a psychiatric report to assist at sentencing but have not had sight of it.

24. I accept that chronological age doesn't necessarily reflect actual maturity and that you are still developing. I will take into account what has been written and said about you.

25. The pre-sentence report identifies a background marked by significant and verified disadvantage and trauma. You were in care from a young age, your mother has severe mental health issues and addiction to drugs, and you have experienced violence and aggression throughout your life. You have been exploited in the past. You have ADHD and PTSD affecting your decision making and at one point you were detained under the mental health act following drug induced psychosis.

26. You showed real concern for your mother on your arrest and I am told she has not visited you the entire time you have been in custody. Your parents have offered you very little if any

guidance and care throughout your life. You had a brutal upbringing. Your care worker is here to support you today and should be commended for this.

27. The Pre sentence report identifies a tendency not to withdraw from confrontation and the probation officer assesses you as presenting a high risk of serious harm to the public, particularly to males of a similar age as you involved in offending, and to those connected with the circumstances of this case.

28. The report nevertheless identifies a number of protective factors, including your resilience, your ability to engage positively with professionals when trust is established, educational and vocational achievements, and the prospect that therapeutic intervention, maturity, structured support and offence-focused work may reduce risk over time.

29. At the time of this murder you had no convictions, cautions or reprimands recorded against you.

30. I will take all of these things into account in your favour.

31. Mr George has addressed me passionately about you. He has represented you throughout and has brought the courts attention to several uncomfortable realities of knife crime in London and the terrible things that have happened to you in your life so far. He says there is hope for you. I hope he is right.

32. However, this was a savage and merciless killing of another young man who was helpless on the ground for which you have accepted no responsibility. You had a choice and you chose to take his life.

33. The effect on Anojan Gnaneswarans family has been profound and life long. He had his whole life ahead of him.

34. The starting point for the minimum term in this case is 25 years and increases to 27 for the aggravating factors. I will reduce this for the mitigation that I have heard and read about you.

35. For Conspiracy to Possess Class A Drugs the sentence is no separate penalty. For the knife offence it is 6 months concurrent.

36.

Stand up please

37. Dino Donaldson you go to prison for life. That is the sentence of the court. This is a sentence that does not end and you will be subject to its terms for the rest of your life.

38. What I must do now is set the minimum term that you must serve before you could even be considered for release. This. I emphasize, is not your sentence which is life imprisonment for murder. You may never be released if you remain a risk.

39. You must serve at least 23 years before you can be considered for parole I reduce this by the 997 days you have spent on remand. That means in days a total of 7398 days. Can be amended if incorrect.

HHJ Angela Rafferty KC

6th November 2026

Central Criminal Court