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'Bandits' didn't see value in gift of probation

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Dumb and dumber. Wait, I need one more word like those because I'm talking about a trio of people here. Actually, "dumbest" works particularly well in this case.

Three members of the so-called Bird Rock Bandits are back in jail after recently violating their probation.

What were they thinking?

They caught the ultimate break in not getting prison time for their role in the 2007 beating death of a young surfer, whom they targeted because he did this terrible thing of spilling a beer on one of them at the La Jolla Brew House.

We may not know what they were thinking, but we do at least know what they were smoking.

All three tested positive for marijuana since they got that second chance.

I don't get it. How can anyone be that, well, stupid?

"It's disappointing, but it's not entirely surprising," said Mack Jenkins, San Diego County's chief probation officer.

The threat of punishment is not the greatest "change agent" for men between the ages of 18 and 25, Jenkins

said.

Those are the so-called “crime-prone years,” he said, particularly for those doing high-risk things such as abusing drugs and booze. Still ...

If I had gotten their kind of break, even at their ages, people would have mistaken me for His Holiness forever after.

But young men with these histories have to almost reinvent themselves, Jenkins said. Get whole new attitudes. Stop with the hard partying. Land a job. And quit hanging around with a “negative peer group.”

Apparently, these young men hadn't exactly turned the corner.

Check out Orlando Osuna Wright, 24, one of the Bandits. Wright tested positive for marijuana nine times during an eight-month period while on probation.

Nine times?

Matthew Yanke, 23, and Eric House, 22, also admitted to testing positive for the drug during a recent hearing before Superior Court Judge John Einhorn, who sentenced them to jail time and three years' probation in September 2008.

One reason for the leniency: They had no extensive criminal history.

After this most recent hearing, he tossed them back into jail. They got no bail. Sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 22, and they could get as much as four years in prison.

Two of the three admitted to seeing each other out and about, which was another big no-no. There was to be no contact between the men.

These men could have been doing serious prison time along with Seth Cravens, 23, who was convicted of second-degree murder in the death of Emery Kauanui, 24.

In February, Cravens was sentenced to 20 years to life.

Prosecutors said Cravens threw the fatal punch in a fight outside Kauanui's mother's home in La Jolla.

The District Attorney's Office originally had charged these three with second-degree murder, which carries a sentence of 15 years to life.

The men ultimately agreed to a plea deal and copped to involuntary manslaughter.

Did the District Attorney's Office expect to find the Bandits back in the courtroom so soon?

“It's difficult to comment on whether or not our office ‘expected’ these defendants to violate probation,” said Steve Walker, a spokesman. “Some defendants are able to follow the requirements of their probation. Some are not.”

Well, if I were a betting man — wait a minute, I am — I'm betting the District Attorney's Office wants very badly to scream: “Told you so!”

The Bandits hung out together and caused trouble in and around the La Jolla and Bird Rock communities. They liked to start fights.

One night, it went too far.

Didn't these guys learn a lesson? One man is dead. Another is in prison.

And if anybody should have been keeping their guards up, it's these guys. They made The New York Times. They had to know if they screwed up, they had better be well-groomed because they were going to be leading the TV news again.

Probation, Jenkins said, is nothing short of a gift. It gives offenders a chance to get on the straight and narrow while still being able to chow at Burger King and see "Avatar."

It's also meant to get offenders some help in battling their demons. House, for instance, was referred to Alcoholics Anonymous.

The other two were sent to drug treatment programs. "We want them to succeed," Jenkins said.

Well, who doesn't?

But if you're the kind of person cocky and mean enough to let fists fly over a spilled beer, I guess you're not about to be humble enough to take this most amazing gift, and say, "Thank you."

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