How Lil Durk Beat His Murder-for-Hire Case Research Brief | Money, Power, War & Crime series

By: Krissy Anne Waters

FACT 1: The case traces back to the 2020 killing of King Von, and federal prosecutors allege that it gave Durk a revenge motive.

- Durk's close friend and label artist Dayvon Bennett, known as King Von, was shot and killed during a November 2020 confrontation involving Georgia rapper Tyquian "Quando Rondo" Bowman's group.
- Timothy "Lul Tim" Leeks, a Bowman associate, was charged with felony murder in the shooting, but Fulton County prosecutors dismissed the case before it ever reached indictment in August 2023, reportedly concluding Von was killed in self-defense.
- Federal prosecutors in the Durk case later alleged that Von's killing is what motivated Durk to target Bowman. The Justice Department itself frames this as the government's theory of the case.

Source: NPR, "Lil Durk charged in murder conspiracy in LA"; Billboard, "Lil Durk Trial: What to Know"; Revolt, "Charges Against Lul Tim Dropped in King Von Case"

FACT 2: Prosecutors allege a first, failed attempt on Bowman's life in Georgia in 2021 preceded the fatal 2022 Los Angeles attack.

- Cooperating witness Kavon "OTF Vonni" Grant testified about an earlier attempted hit on Bowman in Blackshear, Georgia, saying he obtained guns and vehicles and volunteered to participate. He described the overall operation as feeling "rushed" with "no plan of action."

Source: Complex, "OTF Vonnie Recounts His First Attempted Hit on Quando Rondo in Georgia"; AllHipHop, "Lil Durk Trial: OTF Vonni Details Two Quando Rondo Attempts"

FACT 3: The August 2022 Los Angeles ambush missed its intended target and killed Bowman's cousin instead.

- In August 2022, several men flew to Los Angeles, followed Bowman and his crew, and three gunmen fired on his Escalade near the Beverly Center shopping mall. Bowman survived, while his 24-year-old cousin, Saviay'a "Lul Pab" Robinson, was killed.
- The FBI and LAPD built the federal case through surveillance, search warrants, digital forensics, financial and travel records, and interviews with participants who later became cooperating witnesses.

Source: Justice.gov, USAO-CDCA press release; NPR, "Lil Durk charged in murder conspiracy in LA"

FACT 4: The case ultimately named six defendants, built through five indictments, and involved a full team of prosecutors and defense counsel.

- The original indictment, returned October 17, 2024, charged five alleged OTF members/associates including Kavon "Vonnie" Grant, Deandre "DeDe" Wilson, David Lindsey, Keith "Flacka" Jones, and Asa "OTF Boogie" Houston, but not Durk himself.
  - Grant, Jones, and Hester all ultimately pleaded guilty and testified for the government.
  - Hester was not part of the original five-defendant indictment but later pleaded guilty to his role in the shooting and testified for the government.
  - Wilson and Lindsey stood trial alongside Durk and were convicted of stalking-related counts while being acquitted of murder-for-hire.
  - Houston sought severance and was not part of the August 2026 trial. He is expected to be tried separately.
- Durk was added as a lead defendant in the first superseding indictment, returned November 7, 2024, and was arrested near Miami International Airport late October 24, 2024.
- Charging History:
  - **Original indictment:** October 17, 2024
  - **First superseding indictment:** November 7, 2024
    - Added Durk as a lead defendant.
  - **Second superseding indictment:** May 1, 2025
    - Added a stalking-resulting-in-death count and dropped a lyrics-based allegation.
  - **Third superseding indictment:** June 3, 2026
    - Added Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering counts, later severed for a separate trial.
  - **Fourth superseding indictment:** July 31, 2026
    - Split one combined stalking count into two to resolve a legal problem with combining two victims (Bowman and Robinson) in a single count.
    - At trial, Durk personally faced five counts.
- Prosecution Team
  - **Ian V. Yanniello**, Assistant U.S. Attorney, National Security Division
  - **Daniel H. Weiner**, Assistant U.S. Attorney, International Narcotics, Money Laundering, and Racketeering Section
  - **Gregory W. Staples**, Assistant U.S. Attorney, Orange County Office
  - **Michael J. Morse**, Assistant U.S. Attorney, trial prosecutor
- Presiding Judge
  - **Michael W. Fitzgerald**, US District Court, Central District of California
- Defense Team

- **Brian Steel**, defense attorney
- **Marissa Goldberg**, defense attorney
- **Drew Findling**, defense attorney

Source: DOJ/USAO-CDCA press release; MyBasin, "Superseding indictment adds 2 new charges" (Nov. 2024); Miixtapechiick, "Lil Durk's Federal Trial to Proceed With Three Defendants"; XXL, "Fourth Superseding Indictment"

FACT 5: Keith Jones testified about an alleged $1 million bounty, but his testimony about Durk's offer was secondhand.

- Jones testified that co-defendant Deandre Wilson told him at the airport that "Durk got a million for us," meaning Durk had set aside $1 million for whoever killed Bowman.
  - Jones said he believed it because he'd previously seen Durk with large amounts of cash.
- Critically, this is Jones recounting what Wilson allegedly told him rather than testimony that Durk personally made the offer to Jones. Jones also testified that Boonie Moe later told him he would receive $10,000, but that payment never arrived, and he was never actually paid anything.

Source: The Source, "$1 Million Bounty"; XXL, "Keith Jones Testifies"

FACT 6: Shooter Kacey Hester testified he heard Durk directing the operation over the phone.

- Hester, who admitted firing four shots in the Beverly Center attack, testified that before the trip he spoke with OTF associate Boonie Moe, who told him to fly to California, and that he could hear Durk on a separate phone in the background during the call. He described the shooting itself as chaotic.
- On cross-examination, the defense used Hester's phone records to challenge his description of the call as coming "out of the blue": the records showed Hester had called Boonie Moe twice first, and Boonie Moe then returned the call.

Source: Rollingstone, "Admitted Shooter Grilled on Cross"

FACT 7: Financial, travel, and digital records corroborated the operation's logistics, but none directly state that Durk ordered a killing.

- Prosecutors presented flights to Los Angeles and San Diego booked on an American Express card connected to Durk, GPS and speed data from a rented BMW, iCloud data extracted from co-defendants' accounts, and surveillance footage of the rental vehicles used near the shooting.
- This evidence tied money, vehicles, and travel to accounts and property connected to Durk.
  - It corroborated the mechanics of the operation the cooperators described, but the government relied heavily on the cooperating witnesses in Facts 5 and 6 to connect those logistical records to an alleged order from Durk.

Source: Yahoo/Complex, "Surveillance-Heavy Opening Day"

FACT 8: The defense's central theory: cooperator Kavon Grant, not Durk, had the access to run the operation independently.

- Grant testified he had access to Durk's wallet, PINs, online bank login, and Social Security number.
- In closing, defense attorney Brian Steel told jurors, "Grant has resources. Grant has access to all Durk's resources," arguing federal agents had "targeted Durk."
- Earlier, in her opening statement, co-counsel Marissa Goldberg argued Durk "had nothing to do" with the shooting and that Grant arranged the vehicles, fake license plate, firearms, and ski masks.

Source: Balleralert, "Defense Points to Kavon Grant as Mastermind"; DancehallMag, "Defense Points to OTF Vonnie as Mastermind"

FACT 9: The defense attacked cooperator credibility using the government's own interview records against it.

- On cross, a case detective testified that Hester was interviewed 30 times but only 3 sessions were recorded. Jones was interviewed 5 times with 1 recorded, and Grant was interviewed 10 times with none recorded.
  - The detective said the decision not to record followed the U.S. Attorney's Office procedure.
- The defense also introduced a recorded jail call in which Grant, days before signing his cooperation deal, compared his upcoming testimony to a "job interview" ("I'm dressing to impress…well rested, well fed").
  - This was used to argue his testimony was shaped by self-interest rather than accuracy.

Source: LA Mag, "Brian Steel Grills OTF Jam"; DancehallMag, "OTF Vonni Faces Credibility Challenge"

FACT 10: The prosecution's key travel-related text had a competing explanation, and an earlier lyrics-based allegation had been removed after the defense challenged its chronology.

- Prosecutors pointed to a text from co-defendant Jason Smith's phone, "Don't book no flights under no names involved with me", as coded language about the killing.
  - The defense called Durk's talent agent, Jeremy Marcano, who testified he'd invited Durk to his wedding on August 20, 2022, and Durk canceled around August 18-19.
    - The defense tied surrounding texts ("Tell Jay Congrats On The Wedding") to that trip.
    - Prosecutors countered that no flight booking tied to any wedding existed and argued the phrasing "is not even language you would use about a wedding."
- Separately, an earlier version of the indictment had cited Durk's guest verse on Babyface Ray's "Wonderful Wayne" as evidence connected to the killing.

- In an April 2025 motion, Durk's lawyers argued the verse was recorded seven months before the shooting and challenged the government's chronology. That earlier lyrics-based allegation was removed from the indictment entirely in the May 1, 2025 second superseding indictment.

Source: LA Mag, "Defense Rests"; Rollingstone, "Lyrics Dropped from Indictment"; Courthouse News, Def. Durk Banks' Motion to Dismiss (filed 2025).

FACT 11: On September 11, 2026, the jury acquitted Durk on all five counts, while convicting his co-defendants of related charges.

- After three days of deliberation, the federal jury acquitted Durk on all five counts he faced: conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, use of interstate facilities to commit murder-for-hire resulting in death, conspiracy to commit interstate stalking, interstate stalking involving a dangerous weapon, and interstate stalking resulting in death.
- The verdict establishes only that prosecutors failed to prove those charges against Durk beyond a reasonable doubt. Jurors did not issue a finding explaining which witnesses or evidence they rejected or why.
- The split verdict provides additional context, although it does not reveal the jury's reasoning as to Durk, specifically.
    - Co-defendants Deandre Wilson and David Lindsey were convicted of conspiracy to commit stalking, stalking with a dangerous weapon, and stalking resulting in death, while all three defendants, including Wilson and Lindsey, were acquitted of the murder-for-hire counts.
    - The jury found some criminal conduct by Durk's co-defendants beyond a reasonable doubt while rejecting the murder-for-hire theory across the board.

Source: CNN, "Lil Durk Acquitted of Murder-for-Hire"; Rollingstone, "Acquitted of All Charges"; NBC Los Angeles, "Verdict"

FACT 12: The acquittal did not end his federal exposure, and severed racketeering-related charges from the same prosecution remain pending, with a trial set for October 5, 2026.

- The June 3, 2026 third superseding indictment added Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering counts (Counts One and Six) tied to a separate Chicago-based theory.
    - After hearings on July 1 and July 14, 2026, Judge Fitzgerald granted Durk's motion to sever those counts from the Los Angeles murder-for-hire trial on July 14, 2026, finding that keeping the issues clear for the Los Angeles jury outweighed the burden of seating a second jury later.
- Those severed racketeering and weapons counts are scheduled for trial on October 5, 2026, in the Central District of California.
    - They arise from the same overall federal prosecution rather than an unrelated second case. As of September 20, 2026, Durk remains in federal custody pending that trial, as the September 11 acquittal did not result in his release.

Source: Vibe, "Racketeering Charge Severed From L.A. Trial"; Complex, "Lil Durk Gets Racketeering Trial Date"; Miixtapechiick, "Judge Grants Lil Durk Motion to Sever, Trial Set August 20"

HOW HE BEAT THE CASE

- The jury did not explain its reasoning, so no single argument can be identified as the reason for Durk's acquittal. The verdict establishes only that prosecutors failed to prove the five charges against him beyond a reasonable doubt.
    - What the trial record does show is where the defense concentrated its attack: the government had extensive evidence proving the Los Angeles shooting happened and documenting how the group traveled, obtained vehicles, followed Bowman, and carried out the attack. The harder question was whether prosecutors could prove Durk personally ordered or authorized it.
- The prosecution's strongest evidence tying Durk to the killing came through its three cooperating witnesses.
    - Kavon Grant testified Durk directed him to obtain a stolen vehicle for the attack and, afterward, asked him, "Well, do you think that we got him?" and that Durk seemed "excited" and "joyful" on learning Robinson had been killed.
    - Kacey Hester testified he could hear Durk's voice in the background of a call directing his travel to California, and separately testified that Durk told the group anyone who killed Bowman would be "straight."
    - Keith Jones testified that co-defendant Deandre Wilson told him "Durk got a million for us," which Jones understood as a $1 million bounty.
    - Prosecutors paired this with flights and a hotel stay charged to Durk's credit cards, surveillance footage, and a text in which Durk allegedly wrote a cooperator was "ready to snitch."
- The defense's central theory was that Grant, not Durk, had both the access and the motive to run the operation independently.
    - Grant admitted controlling Durk's financial accounts, and the defense argued he used that access to arrange the vehicles, weapons, and logistics on his own, while separately harboring his own revenge motive as someone extremely close to King Von.
    - In closing, Brian Steel called Grant "the most manipulative person" in the case, and Drew Findling called him a "fraudster" and "the master of deception," noting Durk fired Grant a few months after the killing. Steel also played a recorded interview in which an investigator told Grant, "This looks like you're the boss. Are you going down for this one as the boss?"
- Cooperator credibility was the defense's other central reasonable-doubt argument.
    - Grant, Hester, and Jones had all pleaded guilty and were testifying to avoid life sentences.
        - Steel told jurors they were "looking at life in a box" and benefited only if their testimony implicated Durk.
        - The defense also used the government's own interview records against it, and noted Jones "never mentioned" Durk during his first recorded interview with investigators after his arrest.

        - Hester's own wife, Lashanta Hester, testified for the defense that she never heard the travel call he described: "I never heard the phone conversation, sir, period." A separate defense witness who had lived with Grant, Shekema Springfield, called him "a liar and a thief."
- The defense offered competing explanations for evidence prosecutors treated as incriminating.
    - Prosecutors pointed to Durk's text "Don't book no flights under no names involved wit me" as evidence he was covering his tracks.
        - The defense countered it referred to a friend's wedding that weekend, which Durk ultimately skipped.
    - Prosecutors also pointed to Durk's music and other creative material as evidence of a revenge motive.
        - The defense argued it was artistic expression, not an admission.
- An earlier lyrics-based allegation had already created a significant pretrial dispute.
    - Durk's lawyers moved to dismiss, arguing prosecutors presented a guest verse to the grand jury in a way that implied it was recorded after the killing when it had actually been recorded months earlier.
        - Prosecutors removed that specific allegation from the second superseding indictment rather than defend it. The court didn't dismiss the case, but the episode gave the defense a concrete example to point to when arguing the government fit evidence to a theory.
- The court also kept a separate, more serious theory away from this jury entirely.
    - Judge Fitzgerald severed the later-added racketeering (VICAR) counts into their own proceeding, and jurors in the Los Angeles trial heard no evidence about them.
- The split verdict adds context but doesn't explain the jury's reasoning
    - Jurors convicted co-defendants Wilson and Lindsey of stalking-related offenses while acquitting them, like Durk, of murder-for-hire.
        - The jury found some criminal conduct proven beyond a reasonable doubt while rejecting the murder-for-hire theory across the board for every defendant.

Source: **Los Angeles Times, "'Consumed with revenge': Trial underway for Grammy winner Lil Durk, accused of murder-for-hire" (Aug. 24, 2026); Los Angeles Times, "Federal jury in Los Angeles acquits Grammy-winning rapper Lil Durk in murder-for-hire case" (Sept. 11, 2026); Rolling Stone, "Lil Durk Trial Openings: Defense Claims Rapper Unfairly Offered as 'Big Fish' By Co-Defendant" (Aug. 25, 2026); Rolling Stone, "Lil Durk Murder-for-Hire Trial: Admitted Shooter Grilled on Cross, Confronted With Jail Calls" (Aug. 29, 2026); Rolling Stone, "Lil Durk Murder-for-Hire Trial: Shooter's Wife and Mother of King Von's Son Testify" (Sept. 4, 2026); Rolling Stone, "Lil Durk Closings: Prosecutors Hammer 'Revenge,' Defence Cites 'Tsunami of Reasonable Doubt'" (Sept. 9, 2026); Courthouse News, "Def. Durk Banks' Motion to Dismiss" (filed Apr. 18, 2025); Complex, "Lil Durk Wins Motion to Have Racketeering Charges Excluded From Upcoming Trial" (July 14, 2026)**

WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD

- The September 11, 2026 acquittal resolved only the Los Angeles murder-for-hire counts. It's not the end of Durk's legal exposure. He remains in federal custody, held for the October 5, 2026 trial on the severed racketeering and weapons counts (Fact 12).

Source: **Rollingout, "Lil Durk Beats One Case and Faces Another"**

THE COMPLETE TIMELINE

- **November 2020:** King Von (Dayvon Bennett) is shot and killed during a confrontation involving Quando Rondo's (Tyquian Bowman's) group; Timothy "Lul Tim" Leeks is charged with felony murder.
- **2021:** Alleged first, failed attempt on Bowman's life in Blackshear, Georgia (per Kavon Grant's testimony).
- **August 2022:** Gunmen ambush Bowman's Escalade near the Beverly Center in Los Angeles; Bowman survives, his cousin Saviay'a Robinson is killed.
- **August 2023:** Fulton County prosecutors dismiss the felony murder case against Leeks before indictment.
- **October 17, 2024:** Original indictment returned against five alleged OTF associates (not yet including Durk).
- **October 24, 2024:** Durk arrested near Miami International Airport on a federal murder-for-hire charge.
- **November 7, 2024:** First superseding indictment adds Durk as lead defendant.
- **April 2025:** Durk's motion to dismiss argues disputed lyrics were recorded seven months before the shooting
- **May 1, 2025:** Second superseding indictment adds a stalking-resulting-in-death count and removes the lyrics allegation entirely.
- **June 3, 2026:** Third superseding indictment adds VICAR racketeering counts.
- **July 1 & July 14, 2026:** Judge Fitzgerald hears and then grants Durk's motion to sever the VICAR/racketeering counts into a separate later trial.
- **July 31, 2026:** Fourth superseding indictment splits a combined stalking count into two distinct counts.
- **August 20–21, 2026:** Jury selection held over two days in Los Angeles; a 16-person panel (including 4 alternates) is seated.
- **August 24, 2026:** Opening statements begin.
- **Late August–early September 2026:** Cooperators Grant, Hester, and Jones testify; defense cross-examines on unrecorded interviews and inconsistencies; defense calls Jeremy Marcano; closing arguments held.
- **September 11, 2026:** After three days of deliberation, the jury acquits Durk on all five counts; co-defendants Wilson and Lindsey are convicted of stalking-related counts and acquitted of murder-for-hire.
- **October 5, 2026:** Trial on the severed racketeering and weapons counts scheduled to begin; Durk remains in federal custody.

Source: **Billboard, "Lil Durk Trial: What to Know"; DancehallMag, "Trial Begins Monday With Jury Seated"; Courthouse News, "Lil Durk's murder-for-hire trial opens in LA"**