

## ***Oscar Pistorius, Olympic Athlete Convicted of Murder, to Be Paroled***

The South African sprinter, who garnered global headlines after killing his girlfriend in 2013, will be released in January after meeting the requirements for parole.



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Oscar Pistorius arriving at the Pretoria High Court in 2016. A parole board granted Mr. Pistorius's petition for parole on the basis that he had served half of his 15-year sentence. John Wessels/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



By **Lynsey Chutel**

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Oscar Pistorius, a once-inspirational figure who gained international fame as an Olympic sprinter for South Africa before he was convicted of murdering his girlfriend, will be released on parole, the authorities said on Friday.

A parole board granted Mr. Pistorius's petition on the basis that he had served half of his 15-year sentence for killing his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at his home a decade ago, making him eligible for parole according to South African law.

After the decision, the Steenkamp family released a statement on behalf of Ms. Steenkamp's mother, June, who has become a proponent of victims' rights since the murder.

"June is satisfied with the conditions imposed by the parole board, as it sends a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated," it read in part. And in a reference to an annual national public campaign to create awareness of such violence, it added, "This is especially relevant in light of the start of 16 days of activism tomorrow."

For his part, Mr. Pistorius is "happy" and "grateful" that he is set to be released, his lawyer Conrad Dormehl said, although he had hoped to spend Christmas at home. Nevertheless, the certainty of his release date has put to bed much of the confusion around his parole, Mr. Dormehl added.

The Department of Correctional Services said in a statement that Mr. Pistorius, who will be released on Jan. 5, was a "first-time offender, with a positive support system" and therefore met the requirements for parole.

He will be subject to several conditions, in addition to being monitored "just like all other parolees," the department said. He will be prohibited from traveling outside the Pretoria area without permission and required to attend a course on anger management and to perform community service.

Before his downfall, Mr. Pistorius, now 37, was celebrated around the world as an athlete who had overcome personal adversity as a double amputee and fought for the right to compete in the Olympics, earning the nickname the Blade Runner for the carbon-fiber prosthetic blades that he used to race.

In March, the board denied parole for Mr. Pistorius, saying the authorities had incorrectly credited him with having served the minimum required period of detention, the Department of Correctional Services said at the time.

The calculation was based on a misinterpretation of when Mr. Pistorius's sentence for murder began. He was initially convicted of manslaughter, but prosecutors appealed, and his conviction was upgraded to murder. An appeals court increased his sentence to 15 years from six years. That is the minimum recommended by South African law for unpremeditated murder.

This year, after his parole was rejected, Mr. Pistorius's lawyers asked South Africa's Constitutional Court, the highest decision-making body in the country,

to rule on the parole matter. Last month the court ruled that Mr. Pistorius had served the minimum term and ordered Correctional Services to hear his parole petition.

The legal uncertainty recalls the complexities of Mr. Pistorius's trial and eventual conviction for the killing of his girlfriend, Ms. Steenkamp, who was 29. Mr. Pistorius shot Ms. Steenkamp, a model, through a locked bathroom door before dawn on Feb. 14 in 2013.

He maintained that [her death was an accident](#) and that he had fired his gun in the belief that an intruder had entered his upscale home in a Pretoria security estate.



Mr. Pistorius was convicted of killing his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp. Credit...Lucky Nxumalo/CITYPRESS, via Associated Press

Prosecutors argued that Mr. Pistorius had killed Ms. Steenkamp on Valentine's Day in a jealous rage after an argument. During the trial, they pointed to text messages in which Ms. Steenkamp said she was afraid of Mr. Pistorius's temper as evidence of a volatile relationship between the couple.

As part of the parole-consideration process, the board heard from Ms. Steenkamp's mother. During the March hearing, the Steenkamp family lobbied against Mr. Pistorius's bid for freedom.

June Steenkamp did not attend that hearing or oppose parole, but she did question whether Mr. Pistorius had been rehabilitated. In a statement, she recalled evidence of his temper, including the text messages and testimonies from former partners.

“I do not know to what extent his bad behavior still exists or were evident during his time of incarceration,” she said in a statement, read by Rob Matthews, a family friend whose daughter was also murdered by a partner. “But I’m concerned for the safety of any woman should this not have been addressed in his rehabilitation process.”

Ms. Steenkamp’s father, Barry Steenkamp, died in September at 80. In media interviews, Mr. Steenkamp had maintained that Mr. Pistorius deliberately shot his daughter.

South African prison officials avoid releasing parolees during the holiday season, Singabakho Nxumalo, a spokesman for the Department of Correctional Services, said. The Christmas break over the summer holiday in South Africa could present many “temptations” for recently released prisoners, he added.

Before his conviction, Mr. Pistorius was celebrated as an inspirational figure. He was born without a fibula — one of the bones that run between the knee and ankle — in either leg. His legs were amputated before his first birthday, and before his second birthday he was walking on prosthetics.

By age 17, Mr. Pistorius had [won gold medals](#) in the 2004 Summer Paralympics in Athens. Despite [continued wins](#) in the Paralympics games, Mr. Pistorius was determined to compete against able-bodied athletes.

The world athletic body, the I.A.A.F., [rejected](#) his bid to compete in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but after winning an appeal he later qualified for and was allowed to compete in the London Games.

He ran the 400 meters at the 2012 Olympics in London, becoming the first double amputee to compete in the Olympic Games and reaching the semifinals. The fact that he did not win any medals did little to diminish his global profile.

His success on the track also brought wealth and a degree of infamy: He earned more than \$1 million in endorsements with major brands and made headlines for crashing his boat in 2008 and for his extravagant taste in pets (two white tigers).

He also earned a spot on [People Magazine's sexiest athletes](#) list, while he and Ms. Steenkamp regularly walked the red carpet in South Africa.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/24/world/africa/oscar-pistorius-released-parole.html>

I was in South Africa at the time of Reeva's killing and the aftermath leading to Oscar Pistorius's arrest. In any unsentimental, unbiased reading of events, Pistorius was as guilty as could be. By then, he was an egomaniacal, mentally ill monster distorted by a head-spinning mix of deformity and adversity, then unparalleled success,\* fame and adulation, probably amped up by drugs. Reeva was the classic down-to-earth Afrikaner girl from ordinary circumstances whose natural beauty and generous manner lifted her to national stardom, the South African woman "fit" to be Bladerunner's mate. Instead, she was about to break up with Oscar, and this incensed him to where he in a psychotic, narcissistically-wounded state lost control and shot her through the door of the bathroom in which she was hiding.

I will never forget a beautiful young South African woman, toiling away in a shop, whom I discussed this with at the time. Rather than outrage at what Oscar had done to Reeva, her eyes and manner expressed that she would gladly take Reeva's place with "poor Oscar." Another window into why psychopathology thrives in this world.

Here once, waiting in line in Costco—now vintage "Canadian experience"—I looked back at the couple behind me, a man in particular. Resuming my forward gaze, I thought "I know those (burning) eyes." A casual repeat glance worthy of any spy brought it to clarity: Colin Thatcher (and his third wife, after Joanne Wilson and the first one he married in prison), leading the epitome of affluent normal life again coming in from the Thunder Creek family ranch. If I hadn't been such a nice guy back then, I might have calmly squared up that face, looked in those eyes, and let him know I always thought he should be a free man enjoying ordinary life—as soon as Joanne herself climbed out of the grave and resumed enjoying it too. Life in prison, with decades of parole, itself is too easy on murderers like lifetime-psychopath Colin Thatcher who did it long-premeditated out of pure narcissistic spite. Narcissism is too "clinical" and pedestrian for people like him; his father Ross—once Premier, my father's anti-CCF hero, and a piece of work himself—made Colin into a monster from childhood. TJB

\*Oscar's prosthetics were later judged to have given him an unfair advantage.