

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by
Minn. R. Civ. App. P. 136.01, subd. 1(c).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
IN COURT OF APPEALS
A24-0783**

State of Minnesota,
Respondent,

vs.

Khaaliq Sayyed Rakim Dotson,
Appellant.

**Filed September 8, 2025
Affirmed
Bentley, Judge**

Hennepin County District Court
File No. 27-CR-23-14297

Keith Ellison, Attorney General, St. Paul, Minnesota; and

Mary F. Moriarty, Hennepin County Attorney, N. Nate Summers, Assistant County Attorney, Minneapolis, Minnesota (for respondent)

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Suzanne M. Senecal-Hill, Assistant Public Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant)

Considered and decided by Bentley, Presiding Judge; Larkin, Judge; and Larson, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

BENTLEY, Judge

In this appeal from a judgment of conviction for aiding and abetting first-degree assault, appellant Khaaliq Sayyed Rakim Dotson argues that his conviction must be

reversed for insufficient evidence because “grave doubts exist regarding the reliability of” the state’s sole eyewitness. We affirm.

FACTS

The relevant facts were elicited at a jury trial, largely from the testimony of M.L., the eyewitness.

At around 2 a.m. on June 25, 2023, M.L. drove to downtown Minneapolis to pick up her daughter, who had asked for a ride after a night out with a friend. M.L. parked near the area where she expected to pick up her daughter. While she looked for her daughter from the car, she observed the following events happen “right in front of [her],” at a distance of about 25 to 30 feet.

M.L. saw a group of men and women on the sidewalk. A “young man” (victim)—who was not part of the group—fell as he passed them. M.L. saw the three men in the group stop walking and begin “punching and kicking [the victim] very severely.” M.L., who remembered the men “very distinctly,” testified that one of the three men, later identified as Dotson, wore “a purple shirt-type thing” and was “pretty skinny and a little taller.” M.L. testified that she saw Dotson “kick[] [the victim] so hard it was like he was punting for the Super Bowl.” Dotson “reared back and . . . used his arms” while kicking the victim multiple times “between his head and his upper chest, armpit area.” Throughout the assault, M.L. “had the window rolled down,” honked her horn, flashed her lights, and yelled at the men to stop, to no avail.

As the men started to leave, M.L. “could tell that [the victim] was really hurt badly.” One of the men “picked up [the victim’s] hand and it just flopped to the ground.” M.L. saw

one of the men take the victim's shoes but she was not sure if they took anything else. M.L. "didn't even think to grab [her] phone and record everything" during the incident, but she took a video of the assailants as they walked away, and she called 911. When the police arrived, M.L. showed them the video on her phone and described what she saw.

The victim, who was non-responsive after the assault, sustained serious injuries. According to the doctor who examined him when he arrived at the hospital, the victim's injuries were consistent with "severe blunt force to the . . . head" and required emergency brain surgery.

After checking surveillance footage from the area where the assault occurred, law enforcement identified one of the men in the video taken by M.L. and learned that he was associated with Dotson. Based on Dotson's social media profile, law enforcement suspected that Dotson was the person in the purple sweatshirt. Dotson was arrested and charged with aiding and abetting first-degree assault, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 609.221, subd. 1 (2022), with reference to § 609.05, subds. 1, 2 (2022), and aiding and abetting first-degree aggravated robbery, in violation of Minn. Stat. § 609.245, subd. 1 (2022), with reference to § 609.05, subds. 1, 2.

At trial, Dotson testified in his defense. He admitted that he was the person wearing the purple sweatshirt in the video and was "pretty sure" he was with one of the other men on the night of the offense. Dotson said he lacked "a clear memory of everything that happened" that night but also "[knew] for a fact [he] did not" assault the victim because he "would have remembered doing something like that." Dotson could not recall whether he

had smoked marijuana or drank alcohol that night but assumed that he had because that was something he normally did every day.

The jury found Dotson not guilty of aiding and abetting aggravated robbery and guilty of aiding and abetting first-degree assault. The district court sentenced Dotson to 172 months' imprisonment.

Dotson appeals.

DECISION

Dotson argues that his conviction must be reversed for insufficient evidence that he participated in the assault because “grave doubts exist regarding the reliability of” M.L.’s testimony. Specifically, he argues that “the stress and unexpected nature of the incident, combined with how quickly it transpired,” and “the lateness of the night, the darkness, the rain, and the distance” from which she observed the incident contributed to the doubts regarding the reliability of her testimony.

To sustain a conviction, the state must prove each element of the crime charged beyond a reasonable doubt. *State v. Merrill*, 428 N.W.2d 361, 366 (Minn. 1988) (citing *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364 (1970)). A person is guilty of aiding and abetting first-degree assault if he “intentionally aids, advises, hires, counsels, or conspires with or otherwise procures the other to commit the crime,” Minn. Stat. § 609.05, subd. 1, and the crime is to “assault[] another and inflict[] great bodily harm.” Minn. Stat. § 609.221, subd. 1.

When an appellate court reviews a challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence, the applicable test depends on whether the conviction is proven by direct or circumstantial evidence. *State v. Jones*, 4 N.W.3d 495, 500 (Minn. 2024). Here, the direct-evidence test

applies because Dotson’s conviction rested on M.L.’s eyewitness testimony. *See id.* at 501 (defining direct evidence as evidence “based on personal knowledge or observation and that, if true, proves a fact without inference or presumption” (quotation omitted)).

Under the direct-evidence test, an appellate court must determine “whether, given the facts in the record and the legitimate inferences that can be drawn from those facts, a jury could reasonably conclude that the defendant was guilty of the offense charged.” *Jones*, 4 N.W.3d at 501-02 (quotation omitted). In doing so, we “view the evidence in a light most favorable to the verdict and assume the fact-finder disbelieved any testimony conflicting with that verdict.” *State v. Balandin*, 944 N.W.2d 204, 217 (Minn. 2020) (quotation omitted). “A conviction may be based on a single person’s testimony,” even if it is uncorroborated. *State v. Cao*, 788 N.W.2d 710, 717 (Minn. 2010).

Here, M.L. testified that she saw a man wearing a purple sweatshirt “punching and kicking [the victim] very severely.” M.L. saw that person “kick[] [the victim] so hard it was like he was punting for the Super Bowl,” and saw him “rear[] back and . . . use[] his arms and everything” while kicking the victim multiple times in the upper body. The requirement that we “view the evidence in a light most favorable to the verdict” means we assume that the jury believed M.L.’s testimony and disbelieved Dotson’s testimony that he did not assault the victim. *Balandin*, 944 N.W.2d at 217; *see also State v. Foreman*, 680 N.W.2d 536, 539 (Minn. 2004) (“[T]he credibility of a witness [is] for the jury to determine.”). Taken with Dotson’s admission that he was the man in the purple sweatshirt, we conclude that “the jury, acting with regard for the presumption of innocence and the State’s burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, could reasonably conclude,” *Jones*,

4 N.W.3d at 502, that Dotson was guilty of aiding and abetting the crime of “assault[ing] another and inflict[ing] great bodily harm,” Minn. Stat. § 609.221, subd. 1.

Dotson’s sufficiency-of-the-evidence challenge based on witness credibility is inconsistent with the applicable standard of review. *State v. Jones*, 977 N.W.2d 177, 188 n.4 (Minn. 2022) (rejecting defendant’s challenge to a witness’s credibility for failing “to view the evidence in the light most favorable to the verdict” and “to defer to the [fact-finder’s] credibility determinations”). It amounts to an “attempt to retry his case by asking us to reevaluate [a witness’s] credibility,” which “is contrary to [this court’s] role” on appellate review. *Id.* (quoting *State v. Bliss*, 457 N.W.2d 385, 391 (Minn. 1990)).

Dotson argues that Minnesota appellate courts have reversed convictions where there are “reasons to question the witness’s credibility,” but the examples he points to are inapposite. He cites *Foreman*, in which the supreme court acknowledged that convictions had been reversed in a few cases where the victim was the only witness and the case “involved additional reasons to question the victim’s credibility.” 680 N.W.2d at 539 (citing *State v. Huss*, 506 N.W.2d 290, 292-93 (Minn. 1993); *State v. Langteau*, 268 N.W.2d 76, 77 (Minn. 1978); *State v. Gluff*, 172 N.W.2d 63, 65 (Minn. 1969)). But *Foreman* also reaffirmed the general principal that “the task of weighing credibility [is] for the jury.” *Id.* (quotation omitted). Here, we discern no basis in the record to question M.L.’s credibility. We therefore decline to deviate from our typical standard of review.

Affirmed.