

## **Paralyzed man freed in shooting**

*by Dave Racher*

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The lawyer used his client's disability to win an acquittal in an attempted-murder case.

Attorney A. Charles Peruto, Jr. argued that it would have been too difficult for the paralyzed, wheelchair-bound Rodney Whitmore, 28, to have fired several shots that wounded Stephen Williams, 21, at 2rth Street near Packer Avenue last October, 15<sup>th</sup>.

A jury apparently agreed, clearing him of attempted-murder and aggravated-assault charges.

Whitmore, of Federal Street near 15<sup>th</sup>, had been identified by Williams and three other witnesses.

"How could a paralyzed man sitting in a wheelchair have fired those shots?" asked Peruto.

The attorney said Whitmore was being wheeled down the street by one of the two real shooters.

"He was merely present," said the lawyer.

Whitmore suffered his disability when he was shot two years ago.

Police believed that Whitmore shot Williams "in retaliation" for the earlier shooting, Williams was not charged with wounding Whitmore.

Robert "Randy" Young, 23, who admitted pushing Whitmore in the wheelchair at the shooting scene, is serving 12 ½ to 30 years for his role in the Williams shooting.

He pleaded guilty right before Whitmore's trial began.

The victory for Whitmore against what appeared to be overwhelming evidence, stunned even the defense lawyer.

"I was very surprised," Peruto admitted.

The prosecutor also couldn't believe it.

He even asked that the jury be individually polled.