

Jury's in too fast for kin

By Dave Racher

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When the defendant's friends and family, waiting outside the courtroom, heard that a jury in the man's murder trial was back with a verdict in 5 minutes, they jumped on the lawyer.

One woman screamed at A. Charles Peruto, Jr., the well-known defense attorney, and others wept. They knew what a quick verdict usually means

"You told us you thought you could win this case!" the woman shouted into Peruto's face.

But Peruto remained calm.

"Let's go inside," he said.

And sure enough, Peruto had won the case. His client, Juan Then-Pimentel, 30, was found not guilty of the November 7, 1996, shooting death of Escobar Mariano, 34, outside Mariano's home on Orianna Street near 21st, and the wounding of Salvadore Pena, 42, at the same time.

The family's grief turned to elation. The woman who had berated Peruto tried to hug him, but the lawyer stepped aside and let his client hug him instead.

"The woman tried to bury me just a minute ago," Peruto said.

Two eyewitnesses had testified that Then-Pimentel was the triggerman, but Peruto and Co-counsel Anthony Stefanski attacked the credibility of the witnesses claiming one of them was the actual killer.

A juror later said as soon as a forewoman was selected, a vote was taken to see where jurors were on a verdict, and everyone voted to acquit.

The juror said the panel also found it suspicious that Pena had not shown up for trial.