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Lompoc man found not guilty of murder

RIDEOUT ACQUITTED OF CHARGES IN FATAL SHOOTING OF LLOYD SANCHEZ

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A jury has found a Lompoc man not guilty of committing murder during an early morning altercation at a party two years ago.

Maurice Rideout, 25, was released from Santa Barbara County Jail Tuesday afternoon after a Santa Maria jury found him not guilty of murder or any lesser charges related to the fatal shooting of Lompoc resident Lloyd "Junior" Sanchez, 26, at a Lompoc apartment complex.

The shooting happened May 21, 2011 at the Kailani Village Apartments in the 200 block of West North Avenue as a fight broke out at a social gathering.

In addition to murder, the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office had charged Rideout with personal discharge of a firearm and a gang allegation.

Rideout's family members, Rideout himself, and one of his attorneys, Mark Lessem, wept after the verdict was announced about 2:30 p.m.

The Sanchez family was reportedly enroute but didn't arrive in time for the reading of the verdict.

Rideout's trial before Superior Court Judge Patricia Kelly lasted two weeks. Jurors deliberated the evidence for two days before arriving at a verdict.

"We're just very pleased," said Rideout's primary attorney, Jeremy Lessem, from the Los Angeles area-based law firm Lessem and Newstat.

"We believed in our client from the beginning. We truly believed that he was innocent and we had faith in the criminal justice system, and we feel the system did its job," Lessem said.

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“They deliberated for close to two full days, so it seems like they were very careful and considerate, and took their job seriously and they didn’t rush to judgment,” he added.

Deputy District Attorney Brandon Jebens, the case prosecutor, said he was disappointed in the jury’s finding.

“I believed in my case, but apparently the jury felt differently,” he added.

Jebens presented evidence during trial that witnesses saw Rideout kill Sanchez with a single shot between the eyes.

“He intended to kill him by blasting him in the face,” Jebens said in his closing argument last week.

Jebens said Rideout killed Sanchez as pay-back because Sanchez fought Rideout’s cousin in an earlier incident.

Lessem said in his closing argument that none of the prosecution’s witnesses saw the same scenario and the physical evidence points in different directions.

“The truth is, they have not proven this case beyond a reasonable doubt. Not even close,” Lessem said.

He argued that the only witness who claimed he actually saw Rideout kill Sanchez was a felon and a gang member, and not reliable.

Outside the courtroom after the verdict, Rideout’s family members and other supporters shared embraces and words of relief.

Rideout’s grandfather, Jesse Brooks, said the family’s hearts went out to the Sanchez family for their loss.

“We’re very thankful for the jurors who obviously did their work and thought through all of the evidence that was presented to them, and we’re very thankful for our lawyers and all of the people that have been supporting Maurice through this whole ordeal,” Brooks said.

Rideout’s mother, who only identified herself as Donna, could barely speak through her tears. She’d fallen to her knees in prayer in the courtroom after the verdict was read.

“After two years, I’m so happy to finally have my son coming home,” she said, adding that she hopes the Sanchez family finds peace.

“When they were reading the verdict, I couldn’t even hear because my heart was beating so hard.”



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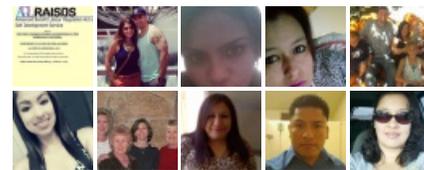
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