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## **Ex-LAPD officer found to have used excessive force in slaying**

**Federal jury rejects former officer Joseph Cruz's account of the March 2008 shooting that killed Mohammad Usman Chaudhry, a 21-year-old autistic man.**

By Joel Rubin, Los Angeles Times

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A federal jury Monday found that a former Los Angeles police officer used excessive force in a fatal 2008 shooting.

The unanimous verdict in U.S. District Court against Joseph Cruz and the city of Los Angeles was essentially a rejection of Cruz's account of the shooting. Since March 25, 2008, when Mohammad Usman Chaudhry was killed on a Hollywood street in the pre-dawn darkness, Cruz has insisted that Chaudhry tried to attack him with a knife and that he fired his gun in self-defense.

On Tuesday the jury will begin hearing arguments in the damages phase of the trial to decide what monetary award, if any, Chaudhry's family deserves.

The jury announced its decision after several hours of deliberations. It found that Cruz acted in "a reckless, oppressive or malicious manner" during the shooting.

Chaudhry was a 21-year-old autistic man who sometimes wandered away from his parents' home and spent nights on L.A. streets. Cruz and his partner came across Chaudhry early one morning as the man was lying in some bushes beside an apartment building. Cruz told investigators that Chaudhry was acting calmly and gave no indication that he suffered from a mental illness.

According to Cruz, Chaudhry suddenly pulled a knife from his sweatshirt and charged Cruz at a moment when his partner was out of sight. Cruz fired four shots, hitting Chaudhry three times.

***Evidence presented at the trial showed that only one person's DNA profile was found on the knife, but the DNA did not belong to Chaudhry. Cruz has refused to submit a DNA sample.***

At the time of the shooting, Cruz was under investigation for an incident in which a teenage girl escaped from his custody. Police officials later concluded that Cruz had made false statements to investigators during the inquiry and fired him for dishonesty. When Cruz filed a lawsuit to be reinstated, lawyers from the Los Angeles city attorney's office filed court records stating that Cruz had no credibility.

In the Chaudhry case, however, both the LAPD and the city attorney's office helped defend Cruz and vouched to the jury that his account of the shooting should be believed.

A spokesperson for the city attorney's office declined to comment.

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