

Jury gets case of 2 drivers, road rage

Pike confrontation ended with punch

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The attorneys in a Newark road rage trial delivered their summations yesterday by asking the jurors: What would you have done in that situation?

The jurors entered deliberations with this question in mind, but left yesterday afternoon without reaching a verdict. Deliberations are scheduled to resume today.

The panel of seven men and five women must decide whether to believe defendant Paul Baker or victim Asante Adler's account of a road rage incident on the New Jersey Turnpike on Sept. 20, 2003. Baker admits punching Adler in the eye that evening, but says he was provoked by Adler, who struck him in the neck first.

Adler says Baker started the fight after their two cars collided during a routine lane merge near Interchange 14 in Newark. Not only did he punch her, Adler said, but Baker also kicked her while she was down. Two witnesses at the scene testified to seeing Baker kick Adler once.

Linda Nevadomski, the assistant Essex County prosecutor trying the case, said Baker should have known better than to punch Adler, even if Adler threatened to kick his car.

"How can anyone take that (threat) seriously?" she asked the jurors. "You can write that in a cartoon balloon in pink letters. The defendant is 38 years old. He's old enough to know better."

Adler suffered permanent damage to her cornea, lens and iris as a result of that punch, said Nevadomski.

The 20-year-old toll booth worker from Jersey City began to weep in the courtroom as Nevadomski began to describe the injuries to her eye.

Baker's attorney, Timothy R. Smith, said his client did not intend to hit Adler, but did so as a

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