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BROOKLYN MAN CONVICTED OF NEAR FATAL ASSAULT ON COUSIN

Jonathan Velez Punched Cousin and Left Him Unconscious on Street; Victim was Struck by Passing Car Minutes Later; Defendant Faces up to 25 Years in Prison

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Jonathan Velez was convicted by a jury of first-degree assault for knocking out his cousin Manuel Rivera during an argument in August 2025. Velez then left the 38-year-old man unconscious on Rockaway Boulevard where the victim was run over by a passing vehicle and grievously injured. The pair was returning from a party to celebrate Rivera's upcoming 39th birthday.

District Attorney Katz said: "Jonathan Velez acted with depravity when he threw a punch at his own cousin and knocked the man to the pavement in the middle of Rockaway Boulevard. After knocking him unconscious, the defendant left Manuel Rivera in the middle of the road and fled the scene. Within three minutes of leaving him unconscious, the victim was run over and so badly injured that he now requires round-the-clock care from nurses and his family. With this trial conviction, we have secured a measure of justice for Manuel Rivera and wish him and his family the very best as he continues to suffer from the devastating injuries inflicted on him by the defendant's actions."

Velez, 46, of Brooklyn, was convicted by a jury Thursday of assault in the first and second degrees and reckless endangerment in the first degree.

Trial openings took place on November 13 and closing arguments on November 18. The jury deliberated for one day before reaching a verdict. Queens Supreme Court Justice Frances Wang ordered the defendant to return to court for sentencing on January 13, 2027, when he faces up to 25 years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to trial testimony, on August 2, 2025, Velez was driving Rivera's car back to Queens from Manhattan with Rivera in the passenger seat. Both Velez and Rivera were at a party for Rivera's 39th birthday, which was on August 4. On the drive home, Velez crashed Rivera's car which led to the argument.

At approximately 4:27 a.m., Velez parked on Rockaway Boulevard in Ozone Park and the men got out of the car and argued. The defendant then punched Rivera, causing the victim to fall to the pavement. Velez went through his cousin's pockets as he lay in the street and then rummaged through the car. Velez then left Rivera unconscious in the roadway.

Minutes later, Rivera was run over by a passing vehicle.

Rivera was transported to a local hospital for treatment of a brain bleed, a fractured skull, a fractured jaw, a fractured pelvis, fractured ribs, internal bleeding and the loss of teeth. He now remains in an unresponsive state and is completely dependent on his family for care.

Assistant District Attorney Hugh McCann of the District Attorney's Career Criminal Major Crimes Bureau is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Caitlyn Muldoon, of Felony Trial Bureau I, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Michael Whitney, Bureau Chief of the Career Criminal Major Crimes Bureau, Timothy Regan, Deputy Bureau Chief, and Kanella Georgopoulos, Assistant Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Chief Assistant District Attorney Shawn Clark.

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