



LOS ANGELES COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE MEDIA RELATIONS DIVISION

JACKIE LACEY • District Attorney
SHARON J. MATSUMOTO • Chief Deputy District Attorney

JEAN GUCCIONE • Director
SANDI GIBBONS • P.I.O.
JANE ROBISON • Asst. P.I.O.

(correction: 4th pgh: murders occurred 3/31/2008)

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Gang member convicted of first-degree murders of two men

LOS ANGELES – A 33-year-old gang member was convicted today of the first-degree murders of two men in East Los Angeles four years ago.

Deputy District Attorney Sarika Kim of the Hardcore Gang Division said a Los Angeles Superior Court jury deliberated about an hour and a half before returning the verdicts against Christopher Lee Savala. She said the jury found true the special circumstances of multiple murders and gang murders, along with gun and gang allegations.

Savala faces sentencing on Jan. 11 by Judge Ronald S. Coen, who presided over the trial. Because the District Attorney's office opted not to seek the death penalty, the defendant will be sentenced to spend the remainder of his life in state prison.

Benjamin Renteria and Diego Vargas, both 22, were shot to death in March 2008 by Savala, a Bell gang member. The shooting occurred in unincorporated county territory in East Los Angeles.

Authorities said Savala was socializing with four acquaintances in the 1200 block of South Herbert Avenue when the victims, reportedly with a rival Maywood gang, showed up. Words were exchanged, shots were fired and the victims lay mortally wounded.

Savala fled, but was arrested by Sheriff's deputies a few hours after the shooting. He has remained in custody since then.

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