

Cleared in Cop Beatings

N. Babylon man acquitted; 2 officers face civil suit

By Letta Tayler

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A North Babylon construction worker has been acquitted of charges he assaulted two off-duty Suffolk County police officers after he testified that one of the cops beat him so brutally he risked losing an eye.

A criminal court jury found Kurtis Ranselle, 38, not guilty of the 1989 harassment and third-degree assault of Officers Darrell Dabe and William Maldonato.

Ranselle also has filed a civil suit against Dabe and Maldonato alleging they used excessive force against him during the incident in Patchogue, which began when he told Maldonato — who was riding a bicycle — that the officer's rear end was showing from the top of his trousers.

His suit is the third civil suit alleging excessive force to be filed against Dabe and the second against Maldonato in recent years. Both officers, who testified they fought with Ranselle in self-defense, were exonerated in the previous cases.

"A great burden has been lifted," Ranselle said yesterday of Friday's verdict in First District Court in Hauppauge.

The defense and the prosecution had been barred from bringing up last month's acquittal of four white Los Angeles police officers in the beating of black motorist Rodney King and the ensuing riots that turned the city into a bloodbath.

But Steven Sarisohn said that: "We were hopeful that maybe it [the Rodney King verdict] would force the jury to

take a closer look at incidents like this. Sometimes juries always look at the police and accept what they say. In this case, it seems they did question them."

Drew Biondo, a spokesman for the Suffolk County District Attorney's office, countered: "The issue of police brutality did not enter into the case."

Robert Kearon, the Suffolk police department's in-house counsel, declined to comment because the civil case against the officers is pending. Dabe and Maldonato could not be reached.

The incident began as Ranselle and a co-worker, on their way to a job on Sunrise Highway on Sept. 8, 1989, drove by Dabe and Maldonato, who were riding their bikes.

Ranselle testified that he noticed one of the men's pants had slightly fallen and yelled out the window, "Pull up

your pants, your — is falling out." After he arrived at his nearby work site at Ocean Avenue, the two cyclists came up and began insulting him, he said.

Ranselle said he then pushed Dabe and that Maldonato pulled him to the ground, while Dabe kicked him in the groin and repeatedly punched him in the head. He said he did not know the two men were police officers until they arrested him while he was being treated for a fractured left eye socket at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital.

But the prosecution said that at the work site, Ranselle blocked the officers for no reason and knocked Dabe off his bike, and that Maldonato injured his thumb trying to restrain Ranselle from causing further harm.

Ranselle almost lost his eye, Sarisohn said.