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Former Wrestler Convicted of Kidnapping Business Associate

A former freestyle wrestling champion from Armenia who claims he was forced to take the law into his own hands when a business associate began plotting to have him killed was convicted of kidnapping Monday by a federal jury in Los Angeles. It was his second trial, the first having ended in a mistrial last year.

Vagan Adzhemyan faces up to life in prison when he is sentenced Aug. 2 by U.S. District Judge Jacqueline Nguyen.

Adzhemyan, 42, admits that he kidnapped Sandro Karmryan, beat him, shocked him with a Taser and held him captive for several days. But he claims his actions were necessary to stop Karmryan from trying to have him killed because he had stumbled onto a loan scam in which Karmryan was allegedly involved. Federal prosecutors said Adzhemyan sought a \$1-million ransom for Karmryan's safe return and then concocted a story to cover his tracks.

While he held Karmryan captive, Adzhemyan conducted recorded interrogations in which Karmryan admitted that he had tried to arrange to have Adzhemyan killed. Prosecutors said the interrogations were done after Karmryan was badly beaten, shocked with a Taser multiple times and sometimes had a gun to his head.

Jurors who heard the tapes and listened to Adzhemyan testify during a trial last year deadlocked six to six, resulting in a mistrial.

At the retrial, which began last month, Nguyen barred Adzhemyan's attorney from presenting any evidence as to why Adzhemyan says he committed the crime because she found it irrelevant to his guilt or innocence.

So-called justification defenses can be presented only if a judge determines, among other factors, that the defendant was facing imminent danger of serious harm or death and there was no reasonable legal alternative to the defendant's actions.

Adzhemyan's attorney, Harland Braun, said the judge's refusal to let Adzhemyan testify about what prompted his actions left him with virtually no defense. "The jury did not hear the most important evidence in the case," Braun said. "They really had no choice, given the evidence they heard."

Asst. U.S. Atty. Robert E. Dugdale, lead prosecutor in the retrial, called the kidnapping a "savage" crime. "The U.S. attorney's office is grateful the jury in this case reached the just and proper verdict," he said.

Galvin "Shaun" Gibson, a friend of Adzhemyan's who also took part in the plot, was convicted as well.