

# Jury awards \$75M in damages from crash

*By David Porter, The Associated Press*

**NEWARK, N.J.** — A jury in Hackensack awarded \$75 million in punitive damages Wednesday to the family of a 7-year-old girl left paralyzed from an auto accident caused by a drunken football fan on his way home from a New York Giants game.

A day earlier, the jury had returned a \$60 million verdict for compensatory damages. Those damages were assessed equally against the fan, Daniel Lanzaro of Cresskill, and Aramark Corp., the Giants Stadium concessionaire that sold beers to Lanzaro at the game.

The jury ruled Wednesday that Aramark was liable for the additional \$75 million. The combined award is believed to be among the largest ever in a personal injury lawsuit in New Jersey, according to lawyers involved in the case.

"We're ecstatic," said David Mazie, the Vernis' attorney. "I think it sends an appropriate message, and hopefully this will make a difference at arenas across the country."

Antonia Verni of Cliffside Park was 2 years old when the crash happened in 1999 in Hasbrouck Heights as her family was headed home from a pumpkin-picking trip. She was left paralyzed from the neck down, and an economist testified during the trial that it will require as much as \$42 million to care for her for the rest of her life.

According to Mazie, Antonia's mother, Fazila Verni, suffered multiple injuries to her face and eyes in the accident, and also had to have a rod implanted in her leg. Her husband, Ronald, was not injured and was not a plaintiff in the suit.

Lanzaro, 34, had a blood-alcohol level more than twice the legal limit at the time of the crash and suffered only minor injuries. He pleaded guilty to vehicular assault and is serving a five-year prison term.

The family claimed Aramark vendors sold beers to Lanzaro at the stadium even though Lanzaro was clearly drunk and that Aramark fostered an atmosphere where intoxicated patrons were served, which is against the law.

A lawyer for Aramark did not immediately return a message from The Associated Press on Wednesday. But Brian Harris suggested during the trial that the vendors were not irresponsible when they sold Lanzaro beer because he is an admitted alcoholic and either did not show signs of intoxication or was able to fool the servers.

The Vernis had also sued the NFL, the Giants and the Sports and Exposition Authority, but a judge previously dismissed the complaints against those entities, ruling they were not liable.

The NFL forbids beer sales after the third quarter, and the Giants close beer concessions at the start of the third quarter. The stadium also mandates that fans can buy only two beers at a time, but the Vernis' lawyers contend that Lanzaro sidestepped that rule by giving the vendor a \$10 tip and was allowed to buy six beers.