Philadelphia Daily News

February 26th, 1996

Lawyer stars in acquittal

By Dave Racher, Daily News Staff Writer

A. Charles Peruto Jr., known for his courtroom dramatics, outdid himself last week as he worked the crowd on behalf of murder suspect.

And the crowd-the jury-showed its appreciation by clearing his client of the homicide charge, and giving the lawyer a standing ovation when he walked to the jury room afterward to discuss the case.

“You gave a great performance,” one juror told Peruto. “Sensational”

During the proceedings, the lawyer climbed into the witness box to mock the alleged drug users who testified against his client.

He pretended to be smoking a crack pipe during his closing address.

The antics convinced the jurors to acquit Desmond Cunningham, 30, a variety-store owner, of fatally shooting Kenneth Cobb,40, on Dec. 24 1994, in a drug house on Sydenham Street near Courtland.

Peruto urged the jury to understand Cunningham’s admission to firing about a dozen shots inside the house. He said Cunningham, of Limekiln Pike near Stenton Avenue, had gone to the house to look for a man who had stolen his car.

The lawyer said a man known only as Mike, who accompanied Cunningham to the house, had also fired a number of shots, and probably had been the person who killed Cobb.

The jury did not let Cunningham completely off the hook, convicting him of an assault count because he had gotten into a struggle with an opponent of the house before the shooting began.