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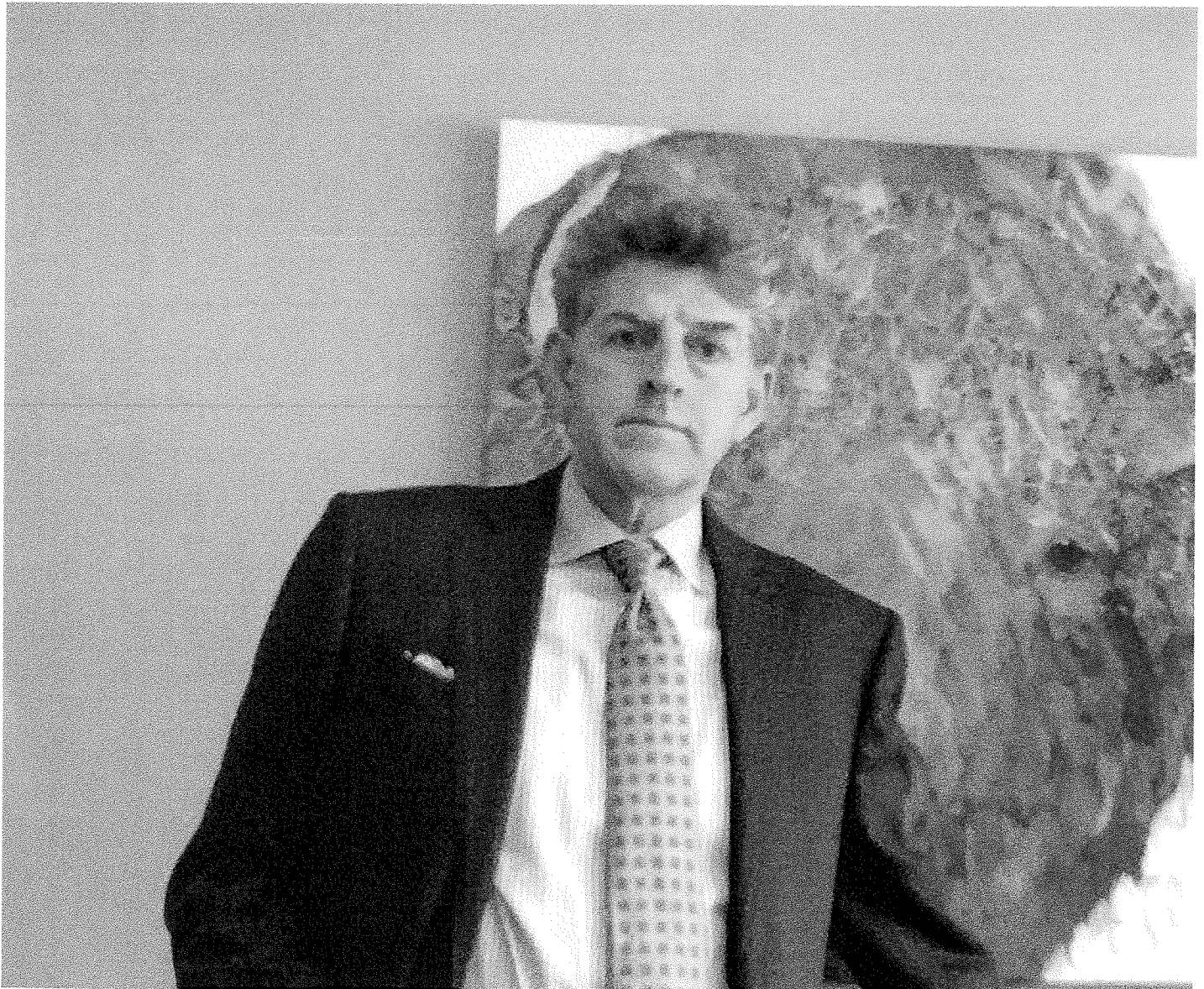
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Why This Verdict Made a Plaintiffs Attorney's Heart Race

"When you're sitting there waiting for a verdict, your heart's always beating like a racehorse," Carl Secola Jr. said. But then the clerk reading the award left out a zero.

By Katheryn Hayes Tucker | November 15, 2021



Carl Secola Jr. Courtesy photo

Plaintiffs attorney Carl Secola Jr. of Hamden said he was a bit anxious waiting for the verdict following a three-day trial before New Haven Superior Court Judge Barbara Bailey Jongbloed.

He said he knew he needed a significant award for future medical expenses because his client, Anthony Fiondella, would need surgery to relieve continuing pain from a back injury in a 2014 crash. And past medical bills had already piled up. Plus it had been a long, painful ordeal.

Fiondella, then 29, was on his way to work as a construction project manager when his Jeep Cherokee was hit by a driver who ran a red light, Secola said. Fiondella complained at the scene of neck pain and numbness in his left arm. He was treated at a hospital with pain killers and discharged. But the pain has continued to the point that surgery can't be put off much longer, Secola said. He said the defense argued that the crash created only a minor strain, and that any continuing problems were caused by something else.

The trial moved quickly—out of consideration for COVID pandemic concerns—but the jury deliberated for parts of two days, he said.

"When you're sitting there waiting for a verdict, your heart's always beating like a racehorse," Secola said in an interview following the Nov. 4 verdict. "I was very relieved when I heard they awarded the past medical expense of \$35,556 and future medical expenses of \$50,000."

But his heart sank when he heard the clerk read the figure for noneconomic damages—pain and suffering—of \$37,500. "Within a second, the clerk said that was a mistake. The number was actually \$375,000 for noneconomic damages," Secola said. "At that point, I pulled my mask down, looked at the jurors and mouthed the words thank you."

The total award was \$460,556.

Secola was suing his client's underinsured motorist carrier, Sentinel Insurance, a division of Hartford. The case was defended by Stuart Abramson of the Law Office of David J. Mathis, Hartford's in-house firm. Abramson did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

Secola said the judgment would have to be reduced by \$20,000 for a payment already received from the driver's insurer in the underlying case. But it would be increased by about \$40,000 for interest since Secola had previously filed an offer of compromise that was rejected.

The case is *Fiondella v. Sentinel Insurance*.

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