

Morales is 'brain dead,' cops have prime suspect

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Police say the prime suspect in the shooting of Ricardo (Monkey) Morales was no stranger to the admitted terrorist and police informant who now lies "brain dead" in a hospital, with machines and tubes providing his only grip on life.

Metro homicide detectives say the man they suspect shot Morales during an argument at a Key Biscayne bar was an acquaintance of the victim.

Police have spoken to the suspect, said Det. Frank Wesolowski, the lead investigator in the case. The un-

identified man called them yesterday and answered questions over the phone, Wesolowski said.

"He got in touch with us," Wesolowski said. When asked if any arrests were expected soon, Wesolowski said: "That's up to him."

The detective refused to comment on speculation that Morales and the suspect argued over the woman Morales took to the bar — and not over a bar tab, as had been reported earlier.

"Right now, we are saying the argument in the bar erupted into a gunfight," Wesolowski said.

Wesolowski said police are still trying to talk to other people who were in Cherry's bar — a dimly lit, wood-paneled lounge that shares a building with Rog-

ers on the Green restaurant — at the time of the shooting Monday night.

Meanwhile, the 42-year-old Morales was in extremely critical condition at Mercy Hospital, a spokesman said. The bullet, which entered the back of his head, left him "brain dead."

Family members were expected to decide soon whether the life support system keeping Morales alive will be unplugged. Morales' organs are expected to be donated.

"It's just a matter of time," Wesolowski said.

Friends of the admitted terrorist and informer said they doubted the official version of how he was shot.

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"I find it hard to believe that he would get shot in a bar shooting," John Komorowski, Morales' attorney for the past four years, said yesterday. "He's too careful, he's too smart."

Morales had a gun tucked in an ankle strap, but never drew it, police said.

The man fled from the restaurant along with many of the patrons inside the bar. By the time police arrived only a handful were left.

Morales was the chief police informer in the celebrated Tick-Talks case, which led to the arrests of more than 40 suspects, mostly on drug charges. The case was thrown out in September when a judge ruled that 1,000 hours of taped conversations — obtained on the basis of Morales' information — couldn't be admitted into evidence, including tapes made from the bug in the ticking wall clock that gave the case its name.

The judge said Morales, an admitted murderer and terrorist who provided the explosives to blow up an airliner headed for Cuba in 1976, was too unreliable a government witness.

Morales, who changed allegiances the way others change shirts, had informed for most of the local, state and federal police agencies operating in Miami. Though he once fought for Fidel Castro, he became deeply involved in the violent side of anti-Castro exile politics in Miami and has worked for the CIA and the Venezuelan secret police.

News of Morales' shooting spread rapidly.

"Someone called me a six o'clock in the morning to tell me about it," said Jerry Sanford, a former federal prosecutor who became a friend of Morales. "He asked, 'Who do you think could have done it?' I said, 'How many points does a compass have?'"

Morales was using an identity provided to him under the witness protection program of the U.S. Marshal's office, Komorowski said. But Morales refused the government's attempt to relocate him to Spanish Harlem in New York City, Komorowski said.

And though the government had given him a new driver's license

and other false identity papers, he had been unable to obtain new immigration papers, the lawyer said.

Morales had been writing a book about his exploits, Komorowski said. The lawyer said the book, in outline stage, would have been "a barnburner... very explosive."

"He was up in New York in the beginning of November, talking to publishers," Komorowski said. "He was talking to two or three, playing each one off on the other. That was his style."

Komorowski called Morales "a real-life James Bond. He's been on every side there's been: Everything he does is for a reason — he's got a master plan. He's the consummate professional. You think that a guy as professional as he is, how's he going to get into a bar fight? He was never unprotected, he was never without a gun."

Last night at Cherry's, known as the "19th hole" at the Key Biscayne

golf course, none of the employes or patrons recalled the shooting. They said they weren't present when Morales was shot. One of the waitresses said the crew from Monday night was told to take last night off so they wouldn't be available to answer questions.

A parking-lot attendant outside said he was working Monday night, but didn't hear anything. Asked if he was sure he hadn't heard "the two shots," he answered, "There was only one," but refused to say anything else.

A customer at the bar, Jack Cendoya, said the place "is like a family. It's where you come in, and you know everybody, and everybody knows you. Mr. (Roger) Nova (the owner) is a very nice friend from Cuba."

Cendoya said he wasn't at Cherry's Monday night, and he didn't think Morales was a regular customer.