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Ex-UFC Fighter Diego Sanchez Arrested on Gun Charges in Albuquerque

July 19, 2025

— Categories: Crime



Former UFC fighter Diego Sanchez has been taken into custody in Albuquerque, New Mexico, after allegedly firing a gun from a moving vehicle near a crash site on Interstate 40. Authorities confirmed he faces two gun-related charges: one felony count of shooting at or from a motor vehicle without causing bodily harm, and one misdemeanor count of negligent use of a deadly weapon. He remains in jail under a no-bond hold while the case moves forward.

According to arrest records obtained by MMA Fighting, the 43-year-old mixed martial arts veteran was a passenger in a vehicle traveling through a traffic jam near University Boulevard on Thursday night. Witnesses and police say Sanchez leaned out of the window and discharged a firearm into the air, shouting, “I love you! I love you! I love you 505!” a reference to the New Mexico area code. Officers on the scene heard the gunfire and quickly stopped the vehicle, detaining both Sanchez and the driver.

The driver, Derrick Montoya, a longtime friend of Sanchez and owner of 3D Kutz Barber Shop, was not charged. Montoya told authorities he was shocked by the incident and had no idea Sanchez was armed. “That isn’t like Diego,” Montoya said in an interview with KOAT. “He has a good heart and a good soul. I just ask everyone to pray for him.”

Court Proceedings

Court documents revealed that police found a spent shell casing on the passenger side of the vehicle. While Sanchez denied firing the weapon, he admitted a gun was in the car. During questioning, officers noted that he appeared to laugh and displayed erratic behavior, raising concerns about his mental and emotional state.

At his initial hearing, a judge approved the state’s request for preventative detention, citing public safety concerns. Sanchez is now being held without bond until a district court judge can review the case. That decision is expected to take place within the next week.

Diego Sanchez first gained national attention in 2005 after winning the debut season of The Ultimate Fighter, where he defeated Kenny Florian. He remained a fan favorite in the UFC for over a decade, known for his relentless fighting style and earning seven Fight of the Night honors. A decade later, his 2009 bout with Clay Guida earned him Hall of Fame status. Sanchez last fought in the Eagle Fighting Championship, finishing his career with a 30-14 record.

In the later years of his career, Sanchez was closely associated with controversial coach Joshua Fabia, founder of the so-called School of Self-Awareness. Fabia came under fire for his unorthodox training routines, including chasing fighters with knives. The pair split in 2021, and Sanchez reportedly paid Fabia \$100,000 to sever ties with the exchange captured on video.

Ricky Kottenstette, Sanchez's representative, told MMA Fighting that the former fighter has been battling substance abuse and has undergone several stints in rehab. Those close to him hope this incident becomes a turning point. "He wasn't trying to hurt anyone," Montoya added. "He's struggling, but he's not a bad person."