

Bulgarian Nick dies in flurry of shots

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Melbourne's unsolved underworld murders



Nickolai Radev, aka Bulgarian Nick.

If ever a man was to be a target of an underworld hit, it was Nickolai Radev, known to police and the criminal fraternity as Bulgarian Nick.

Convicted drug dealer, standover man and would-be bomber, Radev was shot repeatedly at close range in his Mercedes coupe in Coburg just after 4.30pm on Tuesday. Police say his death is the latest organised killing to rock the Melbourne underworld.

Two of Radev's associates who drove with him to Queen Street, Coburg, fled as shots were fired by an unknown gunman.

The two associates were interviewed by police, but told detectives they heard the shots, but did not see the shooting.

Detective Senior Sergeant Clive Rust of the homicide squad yesterday appealed for witnesses to come forward.

"At this stage the investigation is continuing," Senior Sergeant Rust said.

Detectives are investigating reports that Radev owed large amounts of money to associates, and had recently run foul of a rival drug syndicate.

Radev's solicitor, George Balot, said his client's death was a tragedy. "He was an honourable man," Mr Balot said.

Radev, a former Bulgarian wrestling champion, had a long criminal history and had been jailed for burglary, assault, attempted arson and drug-related offences.

A suspect in the murder of another slain underworld figure, Victor Peirce, and a close friend of heroin dealer Peter Allen, he was briefly considered a suspect by the taskforce who investigated the murders of Sergeant Gary Silk and Senior Constable Rodney Miller.

Police sources told *The Age* Radev was the subject of a major drug investigation at the time of his death. He was also due to face assault and firearms charges in August.

Former underworld figure Mark Brandon Read said Radev was known to have run up large debts. "His attitude to personal accounting has always been cavalier," Mr Read said.

"His attitude to personal accounting has always been cavalier" - Former underworld figure Mark Brandon Read.

Radev, 47, was described by associates yesterday as a popular man who liked to keep fit. "Despite his colourful background, I always found him a very pleasant man to deal with," a former lawyer said.

Radev's criminal career began soon after he migrated to Australia in the early 1980s. In 1987, he was sentenced to five years' jail for his role in a plan to blow up a convenience store.

His funeral will be held at the Macedonian Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church in Northcote on Wednesday.