

By what means did Junior Manon die in police custody?

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The lawyer for Junior Manon's family told an inquest Thursday that the teenager's death while in police custody should be ruled a homicide.

Lawyer Julian Roy told jurors they should reject the testimony of two police officers who denied that Manon was never held face-down on the ground, with their weight on his upper chest — and said he struggled violently right up until his death.

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"The evidence can lead you nowhere else but on the rejection of those three points," Roy told the four-person jury.

Roy said the two most contentious questions jurors will have to answer is how Manon died, and by what means.

Manon was stopped while driving on Steeles Ave. W. by Const. Michael Adams and Sgt. Stuart Blower in May 2010. He fled when police tried to arrest him for breaching a bail condition that stipulated that he wasn't allowed to drive.

Adams and Blower eventually caught up with Manon on Founders Rd. south of Steeles and tackled him to the ground. He died, after what they described as a violent struggle. An SIU investigation cleared both officers of criminal wrongdoing.

Chief forensic pathologist Dr. Michael Pollanen ruled the teen died of "positional asphyxia following struggle and exertion." Pollanen based his findings on eyewitness testimony and the lack of any significant findings that could point to another cause of death

But both officers testified during the inquest that they were never on the teen's back when he was face-down. Blower said the dangers of restraining someone in a prone position are "hammered" into officers during their training.

Inquest lawyer Frank Giordano told the jury Thursday that jurors should rule the death as accidental, even though Manon's "death was caused by an external force" during the arrest.

"It's clear the physical struggle with the officers resulted in his death," Giordano said, but jurors would have to be satisfied that the officers intentionally applied lethal force to rule it a homicide.

Giordano told the inquest that evidence of eyewitness testimony was so diverse that, in his opinion, it shouldn't sway jurors to believe homicide was probable.

Presiding coroner Dr. Dan Cass will address the jury Monday before releasing them to deliberate on the cause of death and whether it was accidental.

The jury — three women and one man — will have to sort through the testimony of 29 witnesses who appeared during the 19-day inquest, which started in January.

Roy said Manon was "an 18-year-old who committed crimes, who made mistakes," but that he was still worthy of protection.

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