



Second officer testifies at Manon inquest



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Toronto Police Const. Michael Adams, left, and Sgt. Stuart Blower leave the Junior Manon coroner's inquest last week. (Toronto Sun file photo)

TORONTO - Not to be cruel, but the poor kid was stupid — he should never have run from police.

But that shouldn't have been a death sentence. Why did Junior Manon die after being tackled by two cops on a rainy spring evening? How did a foot pursuit and a struggle end with a teen dead and a broken-hearted family straining for any explanation that would explain the unexplainable.

Ontario's chief forensic pathologist would conclude that the 18-year-old died from "positional asphyxia" — where pressure on his chest interfered with his breathing. Not surprisingly, one of the two officers involved tells a far different story about how Manon died evading arrest on May 5, 2010.

Sgt. Stuart Blower told a coroner's jury Wednesday that while their struggle was "violent, chaotic and frightening," he and his partner never had the teen flat on his stomach because it was "hammered home" in their training not to restrain someone face down. "Although this was a violent fight, I was shocked that he died and I could not find a reason for his death in any of our actions," Blower insisted. "At no time was either myself or Adams on his back nor was Manon chest down."

Both Blower and Const. Michael Adams — who has already testified — were cleared of any wrongdoing by the province's Special Investigations Unit. But several witnesses have testified to seeing at least one of the officers on top of Manon as he was face down during the arrest.

Blower recalls it differently.

It began as a routine traffic stop near York University. He and Adams had pulled Manon over for an expired licence sticker but a computer check revealed he was violating his probation conditions not to drive. When they went to arrest him, Manon tried to run off. As they caught up to him, a fight ensued.

"All three of us fall to the ground," Blower had written in his notes. "I shout 'Give it up' to Manon. Manon ignores me and throws punches at PC Adams. Manon is also kicking and punching."

Asked by Julian Roy, the Manon family's lawyer, if the two cops discussed their planned use of force, Blower was caustic in his sarcasm. "While we were chasing after the violent criminal, we didn't stop to have a conversation, no," he replied.

It was obvious the Aussie-sounding sergeant — he's been promoted from constable since the incident — isn't used to being the one who is questioned. Nevertheless, he had to spend most of the day being grilled by Roy about his actions that evening.

The Manons' lawyer accused the officer of covering the teenager's mouth and nose with his arm during their fight. But Blower said that while he did have the teen in a headlock, he released his arm almost instantaneously after Manon tried to bite him.

"At no stage was my hand around his neck in what people are calling a choke hold. It didn't happen," he said.

Roy confronted Blower with witness statements from several officers who arrived after the altercation and saw the suspect on his stomach. In an increasingly testy exchange, the sergeant said they must have been mistaken — or the beaten Manon may have rolled on to his stomach on his own after the second wave of cops arrived.

“I’m the best person to give that testimony because I was right there, right beside him,” he said. “At no time was Junior Manon on his front.”

Roy then challenged the officer’s story on a number of counts.

He said three civilian eyewitnesses testified that Manon wasn’t resisting the officers once he was on the ground. “Mr. Manon punched Const. Adams a number of times,” Blower disagreed. “He continued to violently resist.”

“I’m going to suggest that you and Const. Adams applied pressure to the top of Mr. Manon’s torso while he was face down during the restraint,” Roy continued.

“It simply didn’t happen,” Blower replied.

“I’m going to suggest you were aware Mr. Manon had become unconscious before the arrival of the second wave of officers,” the lawyer pressed on.

“Mr. Manon was conscious and breathing when I rolled away,” he insisted.

But minutes later, he was dead.