

Toronto policeman feared teen who died in custody

Const. Michael Adams says in SIU recording he worried about being overpowered by Junior Manon

By Dave Seglins, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jan 24, 2012 11:49 PM ET Last Updated: Jan 25, 2012 4:16 AM ET

The Toronto police officer who tackled, arrested and fought with 18-year-old Junior Manon shortly before the teen died told SIU investigators he was scared of being overpowered.

An audio recording of the statement Const. Michael Adams gave to Ontario's Special Investigations Unit, which probed the death and cleared officers involved of any criminal wrongdoing, has been entered as an exhibit at an inquest into Manon's police custody death.

Adams's recorded account, which is coming under fire by a lawyer representing Manon's family, describes chasing, punching with "distractionary blows," and desperately trying to arrest the overweight teen. Manon had a history of drug activities, run-ins with police, and was being arrested for violating a court order that banned him from driving.

'Overwhelming strength'

Adams recounted stopping the vehicle Manon was driving on May 5, 2010, finding him in violation of court orders, with a record of incidents of threatening police and being "anti-police." The officer described being pushed backward into the roadway, and then chasing Manon as he tried to run off.

"I was able to see what I describe as a crazy look in his eyes. He looked directly at me but through me. He was not focusing on me," Adams can be heard saying during the hour-long SIU interview.

Adams described tackling Manon, along with his police partner, and delivering and receiving multiple blows.

"His head was going side to side and his jaw was chomping as if he was trying to bite us. [We] continued to struggle with Junior, whose strength was overwhelming, and I continued to command him to stop resisting and to put his hands behind his back."

Adams said he called for backup from other officers to help cuff Manon.

Manon died from what Ontario's top forensic pathologist has since determined was "positional asphyxia" – suffocation after his exertion in his violent exchange with officers.

In the SIU interview, Adams talks about his reaction to the death.

"I was scared, surprised, sad," he said. "He's just a young man ... I'm a fairly young officer and it's a learning experience going through this, so, scared of the [SIU] process really. To me at that time I couldn't put together how he went from being so strong to deceased. I was going through my actions. Going through what happened and I didn't see the connection of how we got from A to B."

In January 2011, Ontario SIU director Ian Scott relied on the pathologist's report to clear Adams of any wrongdoing, and to declare Manon's death "tragic."

"Mr. Manon was involved in significant exertion leading up to his apprehension in an attempt to avoid an arrest," Scott wrote. "During a struggle with the two subject officers after he fell or was taken to the ground, pressure was placed on his chest in a manner that could have caused it to compress and interfere with his breathing, a classic indicia of death caused by positional asphyxia."

Officer's account challenged

The lawyer for Manon's family, Julian Falconer, is challenging Adams's account. Falconer has introduced a motion asking that video and a police complaints report be tabled at the inquest from a separate incident that took place at a G20 protest seven weeks after the teen's death. Adams is [facing a disciplinary charge](#) on allegations he used excessive force during the arrest of protester Adam Nobody.

Falconer argued Tuesday that, in both cases, Adams has justified his use of "distractionary blows" based on claims that the "victims," as Falconer described them, were assaultive and fighting police.

"Distraction blows, they are code in the policing world for punching people," Falconer said. "He administered punches to the head of Junior Manon, he administered punches to Adam Nobody ... on the basis of alleged violent conduct on the part of two victims."

Falconer pointed to eyewitness testimony at the inquest in which bystanders described Manon as slow and lumbering, being held in a chokehold by police and hit in the head by an officer with a police radio.

"[Adams] justifies his excessive force in the SIU interview by the 'superhuman strength and speed' of Junior Manon," Falconer said. "That is a comical statement now in light of the past few days of testimony. A police officer who is on the service for a year and a half, graduated from college in 2008, manages to find himself in two, highly questionable cases of use of force within a two-month period. The Manon family does not accept this is a coincidence. There is something wrong with Adams's training, or his perception of his training."

Counsel for the coroner joined lawyers for Adams, the Toronto Police Service, as well as the Office of the Independent Police Review Director in opposing the Manon family's motion to bring Adams's G20 conduct into the inquest.

The presiding coroner has reserved judgment on the issue.

Adams is expected to testify at the inquest as soon as Wednesday.

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