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Toronto officer recounts violent struggle moments before Junior Manon died

Megan O'Toole, National Post
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A police officer involved in the arrest of Junior Manon, a Toronto teenager who died in custody nearly two years ago, recounted a violent struggle in the last minutes of the young man's life.

Constable Michael Adams — one of the officers accused of misconduct in the now-infamous beating of G20 protester Adam Nobody — was testifying Friday at a coroner's inquest probing the circumstances of Mr. Manon's death in May 2010.

"We all fell forward together... His mouth was open and he was trying to bite," Const. Adams said of the altercation that ultimately led to Mr. Manon's death.

The trouble began after Const. Adams and Constable Stuart Blower, on a routine patrol in 31 Division, pulled over Mr. Manon's car for having an expired license sticker. When the officers conducted a further check, they discovered Mr. Manon, the 18-year-old driver, was also in violation of a probation condition barring him from driving a vehicle.

Const. Adams, then a rookie officer with about 15 months on the force, recalled approaching the vehicle, pulled over in the area of Steeles Avenue and Founders Road, and ordering Mr. Manon out of the car. But when moved to handcuff the teenager, Mr. Manon spun around to confront him, the officer testified.

"[He] shoved me with both hands, open," Const. Adams testified, noting the teenager then turned to flee.

As the two officers gave chase, Mr. Manon turned toward them at various times and adopted a "boxer's stance," his fists raised and clenched, Const. Adams said.

"It felt inevitable that I was going to be struck," he testified.

The officers finally wrestled Mr. Manon to the ground, and Const. Adams recalled hitting the teenager several times as the young man fought back, struggling and attempting to bite. Const. Adams said he never put his arms around the teenager's throat, nor was

“any significant portion” of his body weight on Mr. Manon at any time during the altercation.

The issue is relevant because Mr. Manon’s cause of death was determined to be positional asphyxia stemming from the struggle, though a probe by the provincial Special Investigations Unit cleared police of any criminal wrongdoing.

This was not the first time Const. Adams encountered Mr. Manon: He was called to the Manon residence a year earlier amid a family dispute, and said he subsequently became aware of other past charges related to drugs and weapons. The line of discussion prompted an objection from lawyer Julian Falconer, who represents the Manon family.

“It’s quite striking how somehow Mr. Manon’s entire history, with a wheelbarrow, had been dumped in this court,” he exclaimed, prompting the presiding coroner to briefly excuse the jury.

Mr. Falconer is scheduled to begin his cross-examination Monday.