

Victim described as a man of unusual strength

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Orlando Rotolo was described as a man of unusual strength who at one point was able to push off four officers who were on his back.

Police had Rotolo on the ground and were attempting to handcuff him, but he was able to get in a push-up position and lifted four of the officers who were trying to restrain him, a coroner's jury heard Wednesday in St. Catharines.

Rotolo died on July 25, 2007, following an altercation with several Niagara Regional Police officers.

NRP Const. Jamie Schneider said he got on his police radio and asked that a taser be brought to the scene.

"You had four officers trying to gain control and it wasn't working."

Shortly after the call was made, police got Rotolo handcuffed, but they had to use three sets of handcuffs because of his size. Rotolo was six-foot and weighed more than 300 pounds.

No taser was used, but one officer used pepper spray, which had no effect, while other officers struck Rotolo with their batons.

Several bystanders have testified they watched police strike Rotolo numerous times.

Schneider was dispatched to a parking lot on Bender Hill, following an early morning 911 call from a male who believed he was being chased.

Schneider said when he arrived he saw Rotolo running and there was an officer behind him.

He saw Rotolo run off a retaining wall and officers went down to check on him.

Schneider said that from his position he didn't see any officers use their batons.

Const. Rosaire Engelen said he tried talking to Rotolo, but he didn't respond.

"It was almost like I wasn't there," said Engelen, who also didn't see any of the other officers use their batons.

He recalled Rotolo spitting blood, but wasn't sure if it was intentional or if he was just trying to clear his mouth.

Det. Const. Josie Hollingshead, who has trained officers on the use of force, explained what training officers are given and the types of situations when officers might use batons, pepper spray, tasers or their guns.

She said officers are trained to deal with people who might be suffering from mental illness and that someone who is in a state known as "excited delirium" could be facing a life and death situation.

"It's a medical emergency," said Hollingshead. "You need to get medical help very quickly or the person may die."

The inquest also heard from Staff Sgt. George Bench who explained the specialized training available to officers. He also explained how police use their computers to keep track of the calls that come in and how those calls are recorded and stored for future reference.

The inquest resumes on Monday, Sept. 27.