



Gwinnett News

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EDITION

FRIDAY, SEPT. 28, 2007

Did father's rage lead to man's death

Voluntary manslaughter: Judge notes accused attacker had just been told his daughter had been molested by victim.

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It's the kind of news no father wants to hear: Someone touched your little girl.

A police officer says that a Buford man heard such an allegation before he broke into a house one night this

month and beat a man he suspected of abusing his 7-year-old stepdaughter.

The victim died two days later.

Police charged the father with murder, but a judge reduced that charge to voluntary manslaughter. The judge reasoned that the man had just heard traumatic news and acted in the heat of passion. The judge also

noted that the suspect had no weapon during the confrontation.

Investigators say they do not know whether the victim did anything wrong.

"We can't say whether he did it or not because he's dead," said Cpl. Illana Spellman, spokeswoman for the Gwinnett County Police Department.

Police interviewed the 7-year-old girl but do not know whether she was molested, Spellman said.

Efforts to reach the victim's rela-

tives were unsuccessful.

AJC Gwinnett News is not naming the suspect to protect the identity of the girl, who may have been the victim of a sexual assault. The newspaper is not identifying the deceased because he was not charged.

A week ago, in a court hearing in the case, Sgt. Victor Pesaresi of the Gwinnett County Police Department testified about the events that led to the Buford man's death.

In the wee hours of Sept. 1, Pesaresi testified, the suspect's wife told him

that their 7-year-old was molested by the man. The sergeant testified the suspect went to the man's house, kicked in the front door and asphyxiated him in the dark.

"He said, 'I did kick in the door and I did punch him three times but it didn't kill him,'" Pesaresi testified.

After the suspect left, the wife called his sister to take him to the hospital and filed a police report.

He was treated and released.

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Gwinnett Medical Center on Sept. 2. He was at his brother's home that afternoon when he collapsed and lost consciousness and was rushed to the hospital. He died the next morning.

The Gwinnett County Medical Examiner's Office ruled the death a homicide.

"We haven't completed the investigation into the cause of death yet, but we believe it was a result of this condition," said Ted Bailey, the forensic investigator.

Police initially charged the suspect with murder, but Gwinnett County Magistrate Judge Mark Layng reduced that charge to the lesser offense of voluntary manslaughter.

The man posted bail and is awaiting trial. He is under arrest and could not be reached for comment Thursday.

His lawyer, John Steakley, said the defendant is "a simple, down-to-earth guy that just goes to work every day."

Steakley said he is doubtful a medical examiner's findings will be sufficient to prove the man's death was homicide.

"[He] was examined and released by the hospital," Steakley said. "I did a CAT scan. I would think an injury would've shown up on a scan."

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Death: Murder was first charge

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