

Inmates deny lethal intent in jail beating

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Yamhill County Jail inmate Zachary Chronister told McMinnville police detectives he and fellow inmate Joshua Mulbreght only planned to rough up or intimidate 34-year-old Jed Myers when they entered his cell the evening of Wednesday, May 27.

They had no intention of beating him to death, they told detectives Bill Christensen and Hugo Cerda.

After absorbing the beating, which caused internal bleeding that ultimately proved fatal, Myers told correctional deputies he was feeling ill. They responded by moving him to a medical holding cell, where they could closely observe him.

He didn't explain he had suffered a beating, but a jail sergeant said it was evident he had suffered injuries in some fashion.

When officers discovered Myers in distress about 1 a.m. Thursday, they called for McMinnville Fire Department medical personnel. He was pronounced dead at the jail.

Chronister, a 20-year-old McMinnville resident, and Mulbreght, a 25-year-old from Newberg, have been charged with one count of second-degree manslaughter. A Class B felony, it carries the potential for a lengthy mandatory-minimum prison sentence under Measure 11.

Prosecuting the two on murder charges would require proving they acted with intent. Prosecuting them on manslaughter charges only requires proving they acted with reckless disregard.

Detective Sam Elliott of the McMinnville police, who attended the autopsy, said Myers sustained brain and head injuries, shoulder and rib injuries and internal organ injuries.

State Medical Examiner Dr. Karen Gunson, who conducted the autopsy, found the manner of death to be homicidal violence and the cause of death to be extensive internal bleeding.

Internal bleeding can produce intense and dramatic symptoms from the outset, medical sources indicate. However, they note it can also produce symptoms so subtle as to go initially undetected, depending on such factors as extent and location.

Chronister is lodged in the Multnomah County Jail in Portland and Mulbreght in the Washington County Jail in Hillsboro.

They are scheduled for video arraignment on Yamhill County grand jury indictments at 1:30 p.m. Monday. The current charges could be altered or augmented at that time, according to District Attorney Brad Berry.

Sheriff Tim Svenson requested the Yamhill County Major Crime Team, rather than an outside agency, investigate the death.

“I made the call to bring MCRT in for the investigation as all of the immediate indicators in the death appeared to be either an overdose or unexplained death,” Svenson said. “There was no indication at the beginning that this was an assault or homicide.”

As the MCRT investigation began, it was determined that it was in fact a homicide investigation, according to Svenson. At that point, the MCRT was immersed in the investigation and there was no need to call in another agency, he said.

“I am happy with MCRT,” Svenson said. “The investigators on that team are top notch. Having an outside agency come in would have been more appropriate if there was a major conflict with MCRT investigators being involved in the investigation.”

Myers was beaten in his E Block cell, according to a probable cause affidavit. Chronister, who initiated the confrontation, said he brought Mulbreght because he understood Myers was a fighter.

Upon entering the cell, Chronister said, he spoke briefly to Myers. Then Mulbreght grabbed him and threw him to the floor — from the top bunk, according to another inmate’s account.

Chronister said Myers landed on his head and ended up on his back. He said Mulbreght then repeatedly punched him in the side with his fist, delivering about 10 blows.

He said he never touched Myers, but understood he shared responsibility for what happened.

Chronister said he and Mulbreght told other inmates what had happened and suggested Myers deserved the beating. He said that could have been interpreted as bragging about the attack.

Four inmates from the jail’s E Block were described in the affidavit as witnesses. They were identified by number.

Witness 1 told Sgt. Joe Shipley of the Sheriff’s Office, participating in the investigation as part of the Major Crime Response Team, headed by Berry, that Mulbreght bragged to multiple inmates how he had dragged Myers off his bunk and broken his ribs.

Witness 2 told Cerda the report he heard was that Myers had fallen off his bed and hurt his ribs. He said Myers appeared pale, pained and sweating as deputies walked him out of E Block to a medical observation cell.

Witness 3 told sheriff's detective Nicole Rickles that the two went to Myers' cell after dinner. He said they indicated they planned to assault him.

He said he saw them emerge about 30 seconds later, and they looked worried.

That witness said he went into the cell and found Myers lying on the lower bunk. He said Myers seemed disoriented and said he didn't feel well.

The witness said another inmate told him the story was that Myers had fallen out of bed and he should stick to that account.

Witness 4 told McMinnville police detective Toby Carver he heard Mulbreght had dragged Myers off the top bunk and thrown him to the floor.

Jail Sgt. Woody Little said Myers had been lodged in E Block shortly after 3 p.m. Wednesday, May 27. He said the inmate was transferred to a medical observation cell about 7:30, after displaying noticeable injuries and complaining of pain.

Myers was examined by a member of the jail medical staff and placed under observation. He became unresponsive shortly before 1 a.m., triggering placement of a 911 call.

Little said a review of surveillance video showed Chronister and Mulbreght entering Myers' cell about 7 p.m. Wednesday and emerging a short time later.

He said it showed them conversing with other E Block inmates, a couple of whom peered into Myers' cell, but did not render aid.