Record, The (Hackensack, NJ)
July 12, 2002
Edition: All Editions.=.Two Star B. Two Star P. One Star B
Section: LOCAL NEWS
Page: L02

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Witness accounts differ in fatal chase

Dirt bike, police car impounded

Author: ASHANTI M. ALVAREZ, STAFF WRITER

Article Text:

Police and the survivor of a fatal dirt bike crash gave conflicting accounts Thursday about how closely investigators were tailing the motorcycle before it went out of control on a Paterson street Wednesday.

Paterson police said Passaic County investigators were following two men as they rode through city streets on the unregistered dirt bike, but lost sight of them before the dirt bike hit a curb and a tree, killing the Hackensack man who was at the controls.

The surviving passenger, 30-year-old Clarence Smith of Paterson, claimed that a police car followed the dirt bike the entire time, at a distance of only a few feet.

Killed in the incident was Dedrick Barker, 30.

On Thursday, state police impounded both the wrecked dirt bike and a police car involved in the incident.

Barker and Smith were riding the 2001 Kawasaki RZ 125 dirt bike about 6 p.m. through an Eastside neighborhood in a "careless manner" and without helmets before the bike crashed in front of 721 E. 25th St., police said.

Police: No pursuit

While the pair were cruising near 12th Avenue and East 24th Street, two officers from the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office were in an unmarked car conducting a separate surveillance investigation, Paterson Sgt. Patrick Papagni said.

The officers - Chris LeMay and Marla Saracino - spotted Barker and Smith and attempted to pull them over, Papagni said. LeMay and Saracino are assigned to the prosecutor's Narcotics Task Force, but Papagni did not know what kind of surveillance they were conducting.

Barker and Smith fled the area but stayed in the neighborhood, Papagni said. LeMay and Saracino lost sight of the dirt bike and drove around the quiet neighborhood of one-family houses, looking for the pair.

"This wasn't even considered a pursuit," Papagni said. "They [LeMay and Saracino] went to pull out of where they parked. They were several blocks behind the vehicle. They never really got close to it."

LeMay and Saracino could not be reached for comment Thursday.

But in an interview, Smith said the police car had closed in on the bike only a few blocks from where the vehicles had crossed paths and that he saw it tailing the dirt bike closely the entire time until the crash. He said that in the end, something caused the dirt bike to jerk forward, tossing him several feet away from the crash site.

Smith said he had stopped looking back once the dirt bike turned onto East 25th Street, but the Passaic County Community College student said he felt the car behind him and heard the siren blaring.

"I felt that cop on us. You can feel the heat of somebody on you," he said, adding that he urged Barker to slow down by tapping his waist. But Barker, he said, did not decelerate from what Smith said was a speed of 50 to 60 mph until just before the crash.

'Never said that'

Papagni said Smith told authorities the police car never touched the dirt bike.

"In the middle of taking a statement from the passenger of the motorcycle, he said [LeMay and Saracino] couldn't even catch them," Papagni said.

Smith denied making that statement - "Nah, I never said that."

According to Papagni, LeMay and Saracino turned onto East 25th Street and saw the dirt bike on the sidewalk, with both Barker and Smith lying on the ground. Smith, however, said that one of the officers came over to him immediately after the crash and told him, "Just relax, help is on the way."

In a story in The Record on Wednesday, police were initially quoted as saying Barker had been the passenger rather than the driver.

Barker, an employee at the Hackensack University Medical Center, was pronounced dead at the scene, Papagni said. Smith was taken to St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center in Paterson. He was released Thursday evening with a bruised pelvis and scrapes and abrasions up and down his right side.

State police would not comment Thursday.

Boris Moczula, acting Passaic County prosecutor, said he referred the investigation to Paterson police and state police because investigators from his office were involved in the incident.

Witnesses sought

Moczula said he met Thursday with Barker's mother, sister, and girlfriend. They told him that they had heard on the street that the officers' car came into contact with the dirt bike. Moczula said he did not know if that version was true, but he urged the family members to tell police about anyone who might have seen the accident.

Police said that Barker lived on McKinley Street in Hackensack. His relatives could not be reached for comment.

A Hackensack University Medical Center representative, citing hospital policy, declined to confirm Barker's employment.

Two acquaintances at an apartment on Michael Street in Hackensack, which Barker's mother recently moved out of, gasped when they heard of his death. They said he was a quiet man who

had a lot of friends. What he liked most, they said, was riding motorcycles and dirt bikes. They declined to give their names.
Smith said Barker had been riding motorcycles since he was 10 or 11 years old.
"He's a really good biker," Smith said.
Staff Writers Peter Pochna and Jennifer V. Hughes contributed to this article.
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Herald News (West Paterson, NJ)
July 12, 2002
Edition: All Editions.=.Late Edition. Early Edition
Section: OUR TOWNS
Page: B01

Topics:
Index Terms:
CHASE
POLICE
DEATH
Biker killed in crash after chase
Cops say he was seen driving recklessly
Author: EILEEN MARKEY, Herald News
Article Text:
A Hackensack man was killed Wednesday night after he raced away from authorities trying to pull him over for driving recklessly, police said Thursday.
Detrick Barker, 30, was pronounced dead after his motorcycle jumped a curb and crashed into a tree on East 25th Street.
It was the fourth fatal vehicle accident this year, the second involving a motorcycle, said Sgt. Patrick Papagni of the city's traffic and fatal accident investigation unit.
Two investigators from the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office narcotics unit were conducting surveillance on 12th Avenue near East 23rd Street around 6:30 p.m. when they noticed a motorcycle driving recklessly, doing wheelies and speeding through the streets, Papagni said.
The investigators, Marla Saracino and Christopher Lemay, pulled away from the curb to stop Barker, who was riding with a passenger and without a helmet, Papagni said.
Barker sped away, alluding them, police said.
The investigators followed him at some distance, keeping him insight until he turned onto East 25th Street, Papagni said.
They then reported seeing Barker and his motorcycle on the ground, Papagni said.
The investigators' vehicle was not involved in the accident, police said.
But neighbors who witnessed the accident told a different story, saying that investigators sped after Barker and were on the scene when he crashed, possibly even hitting the the motorcycle's rear wheel.
The motorcycle passenger, Clarence Smith, 30, of Paterson, was treated at St. Joseph's

Regional Medical Center for injuries to his right shoulder, right knee and pelvis, Papagni said.
Paterson authorities and the State Police are investigating the accident.
Passaic County Prosecutor Boris Moczula said he requested that Paterson police and the State Police, not his agency, lead the investigation since staff members from his office were involved in the accident.
Barker's family did not return a telephone call seeking comment.
The family met with Moczula Thursday to ask about the accident, he said.
"They had some basic questions regarding the investigation and I explained that many of the questions they were asking would require more investigation, they could not be answered yet."
The investigators were right to pursue Barker for reckless driving, even though they were in the neighborhood for a different reason, Moczula said.
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