

Capitol cop gives his account of struggle

By ED TRELEVEN

etreleven@madison.com

608-252-6134

Jamal Mohamed gave police officers a battle, but a state Capitol Police officer said that nothing he did caused the injuries that killed Mohamed about 3½ years ago.

Officer James Brooks was the first to testify as a trial in a police brutality lawsuit against him opened Monday in U.S. District Court.

Mohamed, 21, died Nov. 20 2002, from neck and chest injuries after Brooks and Madison Police Department officers struggled with him while trying to take him into custody to keep him from running into traffic.

"It was an unfortunate occurrence but no, I don't think my actions had anything to do with his death," Brooks testified in response to a question from Chicago civil rights attorney Jon Loevy, who is representing Mohamed's family during the trial.

Mohamed's parents, Halima Abdullahi and Ali Mohamed Abdi, contend that police inflicted chest and neck trauma that killed Mohamed, a Somali immigrant who suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome due to experiences during the civil war in his native land.

"The facts from which you can draw an inference are that Jamal Mohamed died an extremely traumatic death," Loevy said during opening arguments to the jury of six women and two men. He said medical expert Dr. Howard Adelman will show that Mohamed suffered his fatal injuries during the struggle with police.

Assistant Attorney General John Glinski, who is representing Brooks, said the injuries more likely occurred earlier, possibly when Mohamed flung himself against vehicles, and that there is no evidence that the injuries were caused by the police officers.

Brooks testified that after he arrived at the scene near Bagels Forever on University Avenue, he and other officers were able to easily and "peacefully" take Mohamed to the ground, but that he began to struggle once lying face-down on the ground.

Brooks said that Mohamed had arched his back as if trying to get up. But Loevy asked him if instead it might have been Mohamed trying to get room to breathe.

"It could be seen that way," Brooks responded, but he added that he saw it as a person trying to fight and get away from officers.

The move prompted Brooks to place his shin on Mohamed's right shoulder blade, he testified, a position he held until Mohamed was handcuffed and had stopped struggling. Then he said he rested his hand on Mohamed's back until he noticed that Mohamed was no longer breathing.

Brooks testified that he had not put his leg on Mohamed's neck or put him in any kind of choke hold.

The Madison officers were released from the lawsuit after a \$13,500 settlement was reached between the city of Madison's liability insurer and Mohamed's parents. In the settlement, the officers do not admit any liability for Mohamed's death.