

Coroner: Driver killed by Rock Falls police shot - Sauk Valley Newspapers (Dixon-Sterling, IL) - January 31, 2018

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ROCK FALLS – The driver killed in Friday's traffic stop was shot "several times in the back," Whiteside County Coroner Joe McDonald said.

McDonald was responding to an email from Sauk Valley Media asking how many times and where Nathaniel T. "Nate" Edwards, 43, was shot.

"To protect the integrity of the case and the ongoing investigation, which is in fact an active case, I will state that the deceased suffered multiple gunshot wounds from the back and died from those wounds," McDonald's responded in an email that arrived after deadline Monday.

"Toxicology and many other samples were taken during the examination and will be sent for analysis," the email said. Such tests typically take from 2 to 8 weeks to process.

McDonald's initial news release Monday said only: "The autopsy was completed today on the death of **Nathaniel Edwards**; preliminary cause of death – gunshot wound. Further investigation into the events continues, as well as lab testing and toxicology results."

Police have said Edwards was reversing his car "into the path" of the officer who shot him – and who therefore would have been behind the vehicle at the time, which explains why Edwards was shot in the back.

In a news release Tuesday, Lt. Chris Endress of the ISP Integrity Task Force, who is overseeing the investigation, said dash-cam footage from a Rock Falls and a Whiteside County squad car on scene at the time, and a deputy's squad car that arrived moments after the shooting, would not be made public until the investigation and criminal proceedings, if any, are over.

"All the audio video recordings collected are items of evidence in an ongoing investigation, and as such will not be available to the public until the state's attorney completes his review and findings," the release said.

That decision is in compliance with the Illinois Police and Community Relations Improvement Act, which also requires the release of the report "if the state's attorney, or a designated special prosecutor, determines there is no basis to prosecute the law enforcement officer involved ... or if the law enforcement officer is not otherwise charged or indicted."

Endress' release was sent in response to several Freedom of Information Act requests for dashboard and body camera footage. Neither the county nor Rock Falls PD wear body cameras, he noted, and a second RFPD squad car on scene was not equipped with any recording equipment.

According to investigators, Rock Falls police attempted to pull Edwards over that night for an as-yet unspecified reason. He did not immediately comply, was pursued, and eventually pulled into the driveway at 1304 Franklin St., where family members said he was attending a party.

He did not respond to officers' verbal commands, and instead put the car in reverse and accelerated toward the Rock Falls officer, who then shot him, investigators said.

Rock Falls officers and Whiteside County sheriff's deputies performed CPR and used an automated external defibrillator until emergency medical personnel arrived; but Edwards was pronounced dead in the CGH Medical Center Emergency Department at 8:48 p.m.

Edwards, who is black, was the sole occupant of the white Cadillac.

The officer, a 10-year veteran of the force, who is white, has not been identified. He was training a new hire that night, Endress said, and as is protocol, is on paid administrative leave while the investigation progresses.

Investigators have not said what prompted the traffic stop.

Edwards has several felony convictions for driving on a revoked license, and in fact was doing so that night, and a family member has said the plates on his white Cadillac did not belong to the car.

His most recent charge of driving on a revoked license was levied on Oct. 30 and was in the process of being adjudicated in Whiteside County Court.

ABOUT THE ACT

Go to shawurl.com/380n to read the full text of the 50 ILCS 727, the Illinois Police and Community Relations Improvement Act.

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