

PROVIDENCE Journal

In closing arguments, Providence defendant alleges police brutality

Thursday

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. — There is no question Joshua Robinson’s encounter with Providence police in the early-morning hours March 5, 2013, left him bruised and bloodied, with a gash to his forehead and abrasions on his face.

To Robinson’s lawyer, Dawn Huntley, it represented a brazen example of police powers run amok.

“That’s all it was — a story. Sergeant [David] Allen wrote this story,” Huntley told a jury Thursday in Providence County Superior Court.

“He used power, authority and force, and he beat Joshua to the ground,” Huntley said of Allen.

By Huntley’s telling, Allen, in conjunction with other Providence police, concocted a tale that Robinson twice assaulted officers and resisted arrest to cover up his brutal beating at officers’ hands, particularly those of Allen.

“Sergeant Allen had to tell you Joshua punched him in the face,” Huntley said, as Robinson, who stands 4 feet 11 inches, looked on. “That’s the only way the story works.”

State prosecutors had a far different take, arguing that Robinson’s own actions brought on the altercation.

“Joshua Robinson got injured because he fought Sergeant Allen and officers,” said Special Assistant Attorney General Joseph McBurney.

Police testified that Robinson, who was then 21, of Providence, kicked, spit, yelled obscenities and flailed at officers trying to place handcuffs on him after Allen witnessed him putting plastic bags of what he believed to be crack cocaine in his mouth. Allen had arrested Robinson the previous Christmas Eve on a charge of possessing the same drug.

McBurney disputed any notion of a cover up. Officers believe Robinson swallowed drugs, as no crack cocaine or weapons were found at the scene.

“If the police are so devious and nefarious ... then wouldn't they just use some crack cocaine from some other arrest?” McBurney said.

“This was a violent and persistent struggle with this defendant, Mr. Robinson,” McBurney said, adding “Joshua Robinson did not comply with with any commands that ... early morning.”

The encounter began around 2:35 a.m. March 5, 2013. Allen said he saw the Toyota Solara that Robinson was driving roll through a stop sign near the intersection of Sayles and Eddy Streets.

Allen has asserted that Robinson refused to come to a stop, forcing him to block him in. It's then, Allen says, that Robinson shoved drugs in his mouth. Officers say Robinson then struck Allen with the back of a closed fist and that Allen hit him with a flash light to stop him from fleeing.

Robinson says not so, that Allen left a bloody gash in his forehead, and dragged him from the car. Allen, Officer Christopher Ziroli and other officers then hit and kicked Robinson as he lay face-down, handcuffed on the ground.

Robinson is facing two charges of simple assault and one of resisting arrest.

The case has caught the attention of civil-rights advocates, dozens of whom observed closing arguments Thursday, for photos of Robinson's bruised and bloodied face after the incident. His left eye was swollen closed. More than a dozen prosecutors also watched the proceedings.

The trial has spanned about two weeks before Judge William E. Carnes. Jurors listened attentively Thursday, some busily taking notes. They are expected to begin deliberations Friday after Carnes instructs them on the law.