

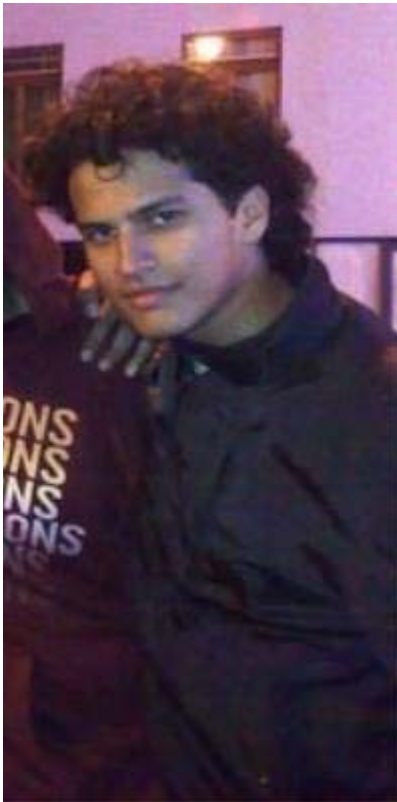


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Wednesday, 28th October 2009

## Mohammed Al-Majed court case: latest



Mohammed Al-Majed



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A friend of tragic Mohammed al-Majed this week told a court how he saw the 16-year-old language student being 'surrounded by men' during a late-night dispute which led to his death.

The 15-year-old, who cannot be named for legal reasons, gave evidence via videolink from the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh on Wednesday at a trial at Lewes Crown Court.

In a recorded interview shown to the jury the youth said he was sitting in the USA Fried Chicken and Kebab shop when he heard that his South African friend Peter Henworth, 17, had got into a fight with several men.

He said: "They were swearing at him. Everyone went outside of the restaurant and I tried to rescue my friend."

The teenager told the jury he tried to 'pull' Mr Henworth away from the fracas but while he was doing this another man ran up to him and attacked him.

The youth, who was 14 at the time, said he was punched in the back of the head by a man during the dispute, which happened late at night on August 22 last year.

The teenager said: "I hit him back in the left side of the head. I was just trying to pull my friend away from the trouble. I was pulled away myself by another friend of mine but within seconds I heard something bang on my head then felt dizzy."

He said he was hit on the head with a bottle and needed six stitches.

The student added: "After I was hit I saw Mohammed on the ground bleeding. I heard he had been hit and had fallen over banging his head.

My friends told me he wanted to run off and escape from all the trouble.

"I saw a group of men surrounding him while I was in the restaurant with my girlfriend. I then saw them running away after Mohammed fell down."

Camden Pratt QC, prosecuting, told the jury of eight women and four men at the start of the month-long trial last Wednesday (September 23) that the evening's events which led to the Qatari student's death started when 21-year-old Paul Rockett, of Ham Lane, Burwash, allegedly racially abused Mr Henworth outside the kebab shop.

He told the court that Rockett and another youth 'picked on' the South African because 'he was black'.

Mr Pratt told Lewes Crown Court that Rockett took a swing at Mr Henworth and missed.

But Stuart Biggs, Rockett's barrister, told the jury that Mr Henworth had made a derogatory remark about a girl who was with Rockett, thus igniting the dispute.

During cross-examination on Wednesday Mr Biggs suggested that the 15-year-old Saudi student had gone out of the restaurant to 'get involved in a fight'.

But the youth stressed that the group of men were 'trying to pick a fight' and he was only defending himself.

Last Wednesday's hearing heard that Mohammed initially hid inside the USA Fried Chicken and Kebab shop with his cousin and the 15-year-old Saudi student after the evening's trouble started.

But he ran off to try and escape and was allegedly punched by 22-year-old George Austin.

Mr Pratt said: "It was so hard it knocked 16-year-old Mohammed off his feet and effectively into the air with the force of impact. Mohammed went backwards through the air, striking the back of his head on to the road."

Mohammed, who was studying English at the EF International Language School, was rushed to the Conquest Hospital where a scan showed he had a brain haemorrhage and a fractured skull. He was transferred to King's College Hospital in London for specialist treatment.

However two days later on August 24 last year he had a heart attack and died.

Austin, 22, of Bermondsey, London, denies manslaughter.

Rockett has pleaded not guilty to a charge of racially aggravated common assault on one of Mohammed's friends.

A third defendant, Alexander Quinn, 19, of Mountbatten Close, Hastings, denies wounding another of the student's friends.

The case continues.


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