

Police Nab Suspect In Subway Restaurant Robberies

By Charles Rogers

Detectives from the 69th Precinct have arrested a man allegedly responsible for at least two robberies of fast-food restaurants recently during which he used a screwdriver as a weapon. They are currently questioning him regarding possible further attempted robberies in the area.

Laquarn Johnson, 30, of Brooklyn was charged in the robberies of two Subway Restaurants, one on September 25th and the other on October 14th.

In the first case, the restaurant at 7810 Flatlands Avenue was the site

where Johnson entered at about 8:45 p.m. as a lone worker was cleaning up. The suspect allegedly jumped over the counter, pulled a screwdriver from under his shirt and threatened the worker, who was in a back room. The suspect then tried to pry open the cash register with it.

"If you come over here I will kill you!" he allegedly yelled at the worker from the front of the store.

The employee told cops the thief was able to open the register drawer and took approximately \$246. He then looked back at the worker, threatened him again, and then fled in an

unknown direction, although witnesses said they saw him running down Flatlands Avenue on foot.

Although Crime Scene Unit officers later found the screwdriver that might have been the weapon used in the robbery, Johnson used a similar instrument once again a couple of weeks later, detectives said.

This time, the Subway Restaurant at 1553 Ralph Avenue was his robbery site of choice.

Police said he used the same mode of operation, apparently waiting until there was only one employee on hand and eventually jumping over the

counter – screwdriver in hand – and prying the cash register drawer open. The amount of money taken was not disclosed.

Police said it was alleged that Johnson was about to use the same technique a week later at a nearby Burger King Restaurant, but he was apparently recognized before he could go through with it

It was at that time they picked him up and brought him to the Foster Avenue station house.

Detectives said Johnson confessed to both incidents verbally and in writing.

Family And Friends Mourn Death Of Aspiring High School Basketball Player

By Jacob Hodes

A young man approached the lectern at St. Gabriel's church in Lefferts Gardens two Sundays ago wearing a sweatshirt that featured a photograph of his friend.

"This wasn't supposed to happen," he said.

He was speaking to nearly 700 people who had gathered to celebrate the life and mourn the death of his friend Shaquille Jones, the 17-year-old student who was shot and killed a few blocks from the South Shore High School campus on November 18th.

He talked about how he had just seen Jones, how wrong the murder was, how senseless. He choked up. "It wasn't even on the agenda," he said.

The church was filled to overflowing, and every visitor in every pew seemed to sit up and pay closer attention. His social proximity to the tragedy and his unscripted language were shattering the protective layers of ceremony. When he returned to his seat, what was left in the air was raw anguish.

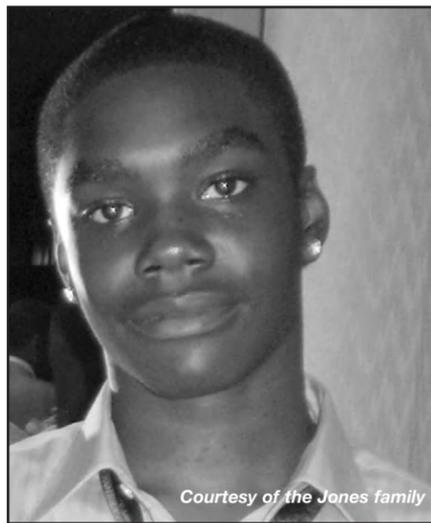
Jones was killed on Friday, November 18th, as he and two friends

were leaving school. A group approached the boys and an argument ensued. Jones and his friends ran in different directions, but the basketball star was chased into the community driveway between East 78th and East 79th streets near Flatlands Avenue, where he was shot in the head and pronounced dead when paramedics arrived.

Friends and family describe Shaquille Jones as a stylish, easy-going kid with a fabulous sense of humor. He had recently turned things around at school, improving his grades and attendance. He was poised to join the basketball team and put his talents to use for South Shore. He had no quarrel with the alleged shooter, according to friends, family, and police. He was going to be a father.

His friends called him Bam, or Breezy, or Bam Breezy. The origins of Bam are obscure, but "Breezy" was fitting, because it meant cool, relaxed, easy-going.

"He wasn't a troublemaking kid. He wasn't looking for problems," said one of his closest friends, who, like several other students, asked not to be iden-



Shaquille Jones

tified by name.

"He was cool in his attitude, cool in his dress, in his friends, in every sense of the word," said his aunt, Valerie Manzano.

Every night, "religiously," Manzano said, Shaquille would iron and lay out his outfit for the next day. He kept his sneakers in boxes and his hats pushed in at the back, as they are at the store. He would shop for Polo items online, searching out deals. Kings Plaza was a worthy destination, but Century 21 was better.

Thelma Straker, Shaquille's grandmother, spoke of how he would make her breakfast on Saturday mornings. Scrambled eggs, sausage, toast. She is elderly, and eating is no longer a fool-proof process. "If anything dropped on me, he would say, 'Gran-gran, let me come and pick this up,'" she said.

Straker also said that Shaquille had a mischievous side. "Gran-gran, want to see my six-pack?" he would ask her, deadpan, while pulling up his shirt and planting his torso in front of her. "Gran-gran, look, the muscles. See the muscles? Feel them!" Straker laughed. "He was something else, you hear?"

Shaquille's cousin Renée Straker, 29, recalled sitting on the front stoop with him and the rest of the family last summer. The two of them tracked the sounds of a nearby ice-cream truck, giddy as if they were much younger. They talked idly about the family's house in Barbados and the rumors it

was haunted. "How many teenage boys do you know," she said, "who will sit at home on a Saturday afternoon with family, waiting for a Mister Softee truck?"

Shaquille's mother, Coleen Jones, spoke of their bond in terms of daily rituals. They would talk on the phone in the afternoon, as she made her way back from work in the Bronx where she is a nurse. "What you want to do for dinner?" she would ask. Often they would set out together in the car to get take-out. Just the two of them. A mother and her only child.

"Basketball was everything for him," said Rommel Lovell, 26, a cousin who called Shaquille "the little brother I never had."

Shaquille's best move on the dribble: pump-fake; stutter-step right then go left; finish with a layup called an "up and under."

"I could not stop his layup," Lovell said.

Shaquille's love affair with basketball began at the age of three, when "making a basket" in a toy hoop became his favorite task. Later, in elementary and middle school, he found a mentor in coach Al Charles, who drove him to exhibition games at places like Riis Park while talking about how to make smart choices in life.

"He had a great heart. I loved him," Charles said. Over the last few years, they had lost touch, but Charles kept tabs on him from a distance. "He had a lot of potential," Charles said. "He made good decisions with the ball."

The coaches at South Shore were aware of Shaquille's talent, but for reasons that are not entirely clear he did not play on the school team during his first two years of high school. Lovell, his cousin, thought attendance issues might have disqualified him. "All he has to do is show up," was what the school's principal told Lovell when he met with her last year. The school's basketball coach and other school officials declined to comment for this story.

But this year, his junior year, Shaquille was going to play, according to friends and family members. His attendance had improved dramatically; he was getting to school on time; and

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75th Precinct And East New York Community Honors Slain Officer



Sutter Avenue station house, headquarters of the 75th Precinct, is draped in purple and black bunting after one of their assigned officers, Police Officer Peter Figoski was slain in the line of duty on Monday morning. All five suspects have been arrested and charged with Figoski's murder.

Inset photo courtesy of NYPD

Basketball Player ...

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his grades went up as well, with fewer Cs and more Bs.

Shaquille thought that being on the team would help keep him out of trouble, according to a close friend, and he also hoped to qualify for college scholarships. He died less than two weeks before South Shore's first game of the season.

His friends say the shift was due to the fact that he was going to be a father; his girlfriend is now at five months. The day before Shaquille died, he talked to his close friend on the phone for half an hour. The main topic was the baby and plans for a shower.

Initially, hearing about the pregnancy "wasn't the best feeling," Manzano said.

"But he showed that he understood the responsibility of it," she said.

In September, Shaquille wrote an essay called "My Goals." He wanted to go to a four-year college, find a full-time job, get married. "I also wanted to get a nice house," he wrote. "I don't really care about a big gigantic house I just want a good size, nice on the inside of the house."

"He couldn't wait to turn 18," Manzano said. A few college brochures had begun arriving at the house, and he talked with Manzano about the relative merits of a local school versus going away. He thought about finding a school near his girlfriend, who had moved with her family to Virginia.

Meanwhile, he wanted a job and a driver's license. He wondered how one went about working in construction. A

few days before he died, his father took him out in his car for an informal road test.

"People are not only sad, people are upset," said Rev. Sully Guillaume-Sam, the associate priest at St. Gabriel's, as he took the lectern. He was talking about the scourge of gun violence which continues to claim the lives of young black men in New York City at an alarming and wildly disproportionate rate.

Guillaume-Sam built his homily on the passage in Exodus where God assures Moses that He has heard "the groaning of His people." In Brooklyn, the priest said, "God has heard the cry of our youngsters, saying, 'We are not safe; we are in trouble; we cannot be in the streets; we are not free.'"

"The situation can change and must

change," he added.

Mitchell Jones, Shaquille's father, spoke briefly after Guillaume-Sam, and echoed his sentiments. "We have to get these guns off the streets," he said. "Please, I'm begging you guys."

After the burial, the series of things to deal with — the coroner's office, the police, the church, the funeral home, the well-wishes to handle, media inquiries, out-of-town relatives — slowed down. The grief of Shaquille's parents remains mostly beyond words. Coleen Jones said she is surviving "minute by minute."

"Whoever take my grandchild from me, I hope they meet with it," said Thelma Straker. "He didn't deserve this," she continued. "Each time I think of it, water comes out my eyes."