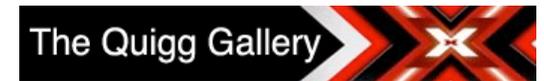


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## Michael 'kicked as he lay on ground'

By Maeve Connolly

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THREE of the defendants in the Michael McIlveen murder trial kicked and stamped on the Ballymena teenager

as he lay on the ground, a court has heard.

Christopher Andrew McLeister (18) is said to have delivered at least two "strong" kicks to Michael's "waist area" while a juvenile who cannot be identified aimed "like a stamp" to the 15-year-old's upper body.

Jeff Colin Lewis (19) also kicked him about the body and legs, it was claimed.

The evidence was heard during police interviews with murder accused Aaron Cavana Wallace in the days after the May 2006 attack.

Mr Wallace from Moat Road in the town denied inflicting any injuries on Michael, telling police "I didn't touch him one bit at all".

The 20-year-old said the fifth person on trial for murder, Christopher Francis Kerr, had not participated in the attack and had in fact tried to stop it.

Asked why the key witness who was standing over Michael to protect his friend had identified the five of them along with a sixth who has already pleaded guilty to murder as the attackers, Mr Wallace said: "We're all round him so he just mentioned our names."

The court heard seven interviews in which Mr Wallace claimed he had not seen a baseball bat but at the start of the eighth interview he conceded he had seen Mr Kerr (22) running from his Carnduff Drive home with the murder weapon.

However, Mr Wallace insisted he was "100 per cent sure" he did not see the baseball bat being used.

Moon (20) from Douglas Terrace has already pleaded guilty to murder.

It was not until his ninth interview that Mr Wallace described the actions of his co-defendants in the alley where Michael was fatally injured.

Claiming he recalled "more stuff happening" when Michael was on the ground, Mr Wallace said Mr McLeister from Knockeen Crescent had swung his foot as if kicking a football.

He indicated to the police that the juvenile defendant had aimed his one kick which he later described as being "like a stamp" at an area halfway between Michael's stomach and chest.

The defendant said Michael's friend had "put his foot out" to protect the injured teenager and said "stop it" but the attack continued.

"I think it was Christopher McLeister who continued it," he said.

After it was over he and Mr Kerr walked behind the juvenile, Moon and Mr Lewis and the court heard how the juvenile turned to them and said: "I can't believe that, did you see the kick?"

Mr Wallace said he took it to mean the kick his co-accused had given Michael, adding that the teenager had went on to say that if his dad found out he'd "kill him".

Mr Wallace insisted throughout the interviews that neither he nor Mr Kerr had touched Michael.

The court also heard the defendant agree that he, Mr Lewis, Mr Kerr and Moon had led the chase of Michael and his two friends from the leisure centre but when it was put to him that the reason they pursued them was

"because they were Catholic and youse were Protestant" Mr Wallace repeatedly said "no".

The jury listened as Mr Wallace said that earlier in the night when one of the larger group of Protestant young people had said to Mr Kerr that he used to be friends with Catholics the defendant had replied: "I learned one thing, don't trust them".

A sixth person, Paul Edward David Henson (18) from Condiere Avenue, faces lesser charges of affray and criminal damage.

The case continues.

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