



## LOWNDES COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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ASHLEY PAULK/ SHERIFF

This document is a synopsis of the investigation of the death of Kendrick Johnson. All the information is derived from the files provided by the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio. These files, approximately 17 boxes, contained investigative material from the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia, Washington, DC Police Department, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Lowndes County Sheriff's Office, Valdosta-Lowndes County Crime Laboratory, Lowndes County Coroner, Federal Grand Jury testimony by 58 individuals, and additional autopsies by Dr. William R. Anderson and the Department of Defense.

I, Sheriff Ashley Paulk, author of this document, was not the Sheriff when this incident occurred. A resident of Lowndes County all my life, I am presently serving my sixth four-year term as Lowndes County Sheriff and am obligated to provide a document that would come from a person who could present the unbiased facts. In the following pages, I will attempt to address all the rumors and accusations of which I am aware.

Also, portions of the investigative material are subject to an order by Federal Judge Hugh Lawson that seals Grand Jury testimony. Consequently, evidence may be included in this document that will be sworn testimony which cannot be publicly attributed to the person testifying before the Federal Grand Jury.

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Because this is a very complex case, I feel that it is best to break the case into the following categories:

1. Conspiring – Cover up
2. Wrestling team bus departure
3. Cameras
4. Shoe storage in wrestling mats
5. Fight on bus trip to Grayson
6. Relationship between Taylor Eakin and Kendrick Johnson
7. Autopsies
8. The viscera
9. Observations upon finding the body

### **Conspiracy - Coverup**

Any person who looks at this case objectively would know that it would be impossible to conceal any evidence due to the involvement of so many agencies and investigators. The FBI states unequivocally in its investigation that there was no cover-up or conspiracy – letter of 12/23/2014.

### **Wrestling Team Bus Departure Time**

For the Lowndes High School wrestling team to reserve an out-of-city trip, the request must be in writing on a standard form at the beginning of the school semester. On October 24, 2012, the form shows a departure time of 4:00 p.m. The actual time of the departure was approximately 12:30 p.m. on January 10, 2013. This is documented by sworn testimony from individuals on the bus, the bus driver, and cell phone tower data. The bus arrived in Macon, Georgia, shortly before 4:00 p.m. The arrival time in Macon is documented by motel check in time and weigh-in data for the wrestlers. This data also establishes that Brandon Bell was on the bus and at weigh-in in Macon. This also verifies that Brandon Bell left the school campus approximately one hour before Kendrick Johnson was last seen alive in the old gym at 1:27 PM on January 10, 2013.

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## CAMERAS

The FBI viewed all of the cameras – approximately 62 – and determined that there were no missing images. Furthermore, they explained the timestamp being different because the cameras came from different servers. The choppiness of the film is because the cameras produce pixel images.

It was alleged that the camera that would have shown the corner of the gymnasium where the mats were located was moved the day Kendrick Johnson died. In actuality, the camera was struck and realigned almost a year earlier on February 13, 2012, at 12:27 p.m. Camera footage on that date verified this fact.

The four “targets” of the camera investigation – Brian Bell, Brandon Bell, Ryan Hall and Kendrick Johnson – were tracked all day on January 10, 2013. The paths of these targets never crossed on that date; in other words, they did not come in contact with one another. The file also contains a map of the school showing the location of the “targets” on the date.

In the same camera review, Kendrick Johnson is positively identified in the old gymnasium walking at a fast pace toward the area where the mats were stored at 1:27 p.m. on January 10, 2013; this is the last time Johnson was seen alive.

### **Shoe storage in the wrestling mats**

Seven different individuals testified that students stored shoes or other objects in the mats. One of these individuals was a coach, and another was a relative of Kendrick Johnson. One individual stated that he and Kendrick Johnson had placed items in the same mat at the same time in the past. One student testified that students would often go down into the mats to retrieve shoes. One individual states that he and Kendrick Johnson stored shoes in the same mat and retrieved them by tipping the mat. Three individuals had seen Kendrick Johnson on top of the mats.

The location of the interior mats versus exterior mats was also verified by testimony by a Special Agent. He also verified the storage issue.

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Another individual testified that additional mats were stored over the Christmas holidays, resulting in Kendrick Johnson's shoes being located in an interior mat instead of an exterior mat. The exterior mat could have easily been accessed by simply moving one mat instead of several. The position of the mat could possibly explain why Kendrick Johnson tried to reach down into the vertically stored mat instead of simply tipping the mat over as usual. The illustration that depicts a probable location of the mats before and after Christmas is included in this document. This drawing is illustrative only and does not claim to illustrate the exact number of mats verified in photographs.

### **Fight on the Bus to GRAYSON** November 28, 2011

Brian Bell was seated in the row immediately in front of Kendrick Johnson on the bus trip to the Grayson High football game. Brian Bell needed to urinate, but he was told to urinate in a plastic bottle. He was attempting to urinate when Kendrick Johnson pushed him from behind and caused him to urinate on himself. Brian Bell got up and swung at Kendrick Johnson, who then swung at Brian Bell. The coaches intervened at this point, and there were no injuries or further fighting.

Subsequently, neither subject was allowed to dress out or ride back on the bus. Brian Bell returned from the game with his parents, and Kendrick Johnson rode back in the front seat of a patrol car, driven by a female resource officer, Deputy Shirley Demps, since no one in his family attended the game. Testimony by other students stated that this fight did not appear to cause any animosity between the two; in fact, they later did a class project together.

### **Relationship between Taylor Eakin and Kendrick Johnson**

It was rumored that Brian Bell was angry with Kendrick Johnson because he had a relationship with Taylor Eakin. The FBI states in two different documents that there was no basis to this rumor and no evidence to support it. It was verified that there were no telephone communications between Kendrick Johnson and Taylor Eakin.

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### AUTOPSIES

Three were entities performed autopsies of Kendrick Johnson. The first autopsy was performed by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation on January 14, 2013, with a report dated May 02, 2013. The cause of death is listed as positional asphyxia, and the manner of death was accidental.

The second autopsy was performed by Dr. William R. Anderson after the body had been embalmed and buried. Dr. Anderson listed the cause of death as “blunt force trauma to the right neck involving the right mandible.” The date of examination was June 15, 2013, and the report date was August 15, 2013. Dr. Anderson did an addendum to his original report on September 21, 2018, which added “blunt force trauma, right thorax.” All of Dr. Anderson’s work is listed as requested by Jacquelyn Johnson, Kendrick Johnson’s mother. NOTE: The addenda required a second exhumation of the body that had been embalmed over five years. Also, the file on Dr. Anderson’s autopsy contains an article from the Orlando Sentinel that quotes the Chief Medical Examiner of Orange County, Shasi Gore, saying that Dr. Anderson lied and that he had a “total fabrication of his imagination” in another case he autopsied.

The third autopsy was performed by the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner. The initial report of August 25, 2014, listed the cause of death as positional asphyxia and the manner of death as accidental. A second amended autopsy report was issued on April 18, 2016, and it states that the cause of death and the manner of death was undetermined. This change is attributed to the fact that additional materials were submitted for evaluation by the United States Department of Justice. The most significant item that was added appears to be a report from the South Georgia Medical Center Mobile Healthcare report that states they saw a bruise on the right side of the jaw.

It is also interesting to note that in the interim between the first autopsy, August 25, 2014, and the amended autopsy April 18, 2016, that a female with the Department of Justice and the male performing both autopsies apparently developed a close relationship in which they address their correspondence to each other by their first names. There is actually an email to another

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individual where this female states, "I had to make him feel like a man so that he would be open to talking" in regard, to the person amending the first Office of the Armed Forces medical examiner autopsy.

### **The Viscera**

The missing viscera has been another issue in the investigation. Obviously, the body contained the viscera when it was transported to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for the first autopsy. In a telephone conversation with Coroner Bill Watson and Antonio Harrington of Harrington Funeral Services, Mr. Rodney Bryan stated that the viscera were disposed of after the autopsy. He recanted this statement, however, in later testimony.

An individual testified that he believes that he is the father of Jacquelyn Johnson and that he was the first person who opened the body bag when it arrived at Harrington Funeral Services. He said it did not contain the viscera at that time.

In view of this testimony, the only plausible explanation would be that the viscera were disposed of by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation because of their advanced decomposition. NOTE: Since the individual who opened the body bag was a former employee of Harrington Funeral Services, he had access to the facility.

### **Observations where the where the body was found**

Kendrick Johnson's body was found the morning of January 11, 2013, when a class convened in the bleachers next to the stored mats. The body was in a "head down" position with the feet visible from the top of a rolled up mat. Several students then notified the coach in charge of the class who immediately placed the mat in a horizontal position, exposing the upper half of the torso. The coach determined that the subject was deceased, removed the class from the area, and contacted emergency personnel.

Fire and Ambulance units arrived on the scene, confirming that the subject was deceased. One person in the group noted that he saw a small bruise on the jaw while another subject who viewed the body stated that he did not observe any trauma to the body or any evidence of foul play. It was also rumored that a plastic bag was over the subject's head, but no bag was found.

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A submission #1, dated January 25, 2013, states, "There appeared to be no signs of blunt force trauma on Johnson's face or body. There were visible signs of skin slippage on Johnson's abdomen area, face and arm". NOTE: The body had been decomposing for approximately 19 hours. The submission was from the Valdosta-Lowndes County Crime Laboratory.

All of the evidence, testimony, interviews, grand jury testimony and even the blatant coercion and intimidation of some persons being questioned does not produce anything to prove any criminal act by anyone that would have resulted in the death of Kendrick Johnson. I do find it disturbing and unethical that this investigation seemed to turn in to a "witch hunt" after the FBI told the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia that they had found nothing criminal, and they consequently were closing the case. Some of the issues that led me to this opinion are all part of the file and are listed below:

1. A person is offered a financial inducement while giving testimony.
2. An FBI Agent is told not to bring or interview a witness because he would not be good for the Government's case.
3. A letter from the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Georgia to the Washington DC Police Chief states this case could make them "famous."
4. The United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia was on a "first name" basis with a person at Ebony Magazine, the magazine that lost a court case for defaming the Bell family and providing the magazine with internal information while the case was active.
5. Interviews were conducted that asked, "Who killed Kendrick Johnson?" which leads the person to the opinion he was killed. The proper question would be "What do you know about the death of Kendrick Johnson?"
6. Affidavits for searches contained blatant errors that never would have been approved by most judges.
7. A text message that is in evidence instructs a person to lie when testifying. The person who sent this text was never even questioned about it.

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8. A prosecutor sent a statement that Eric Holder, United States Attorney General, is pressuring for a result in the case.
9. The email that contains a statement from a female to a male counterpart that states "I had to make him feel like a man so he would be open to talking." After that meeting, an autopsy was amended.

The preceding issues are only a small sample of what a reputable law enforcement officer would consider to be improper.

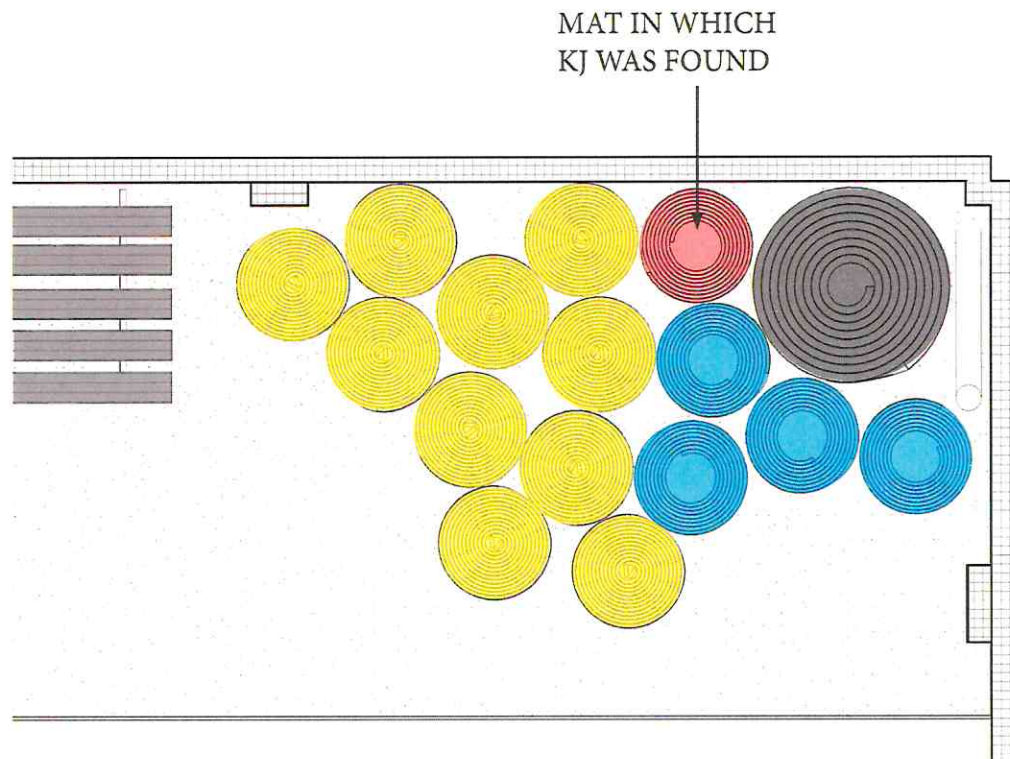
In closing, I am quite sure that there will still be a contingent that will believe there was foul play. I encourage everyone to study ALL the evidence in this file before forming an opinion.

As I stated at the outset, I am only providing a short synopsis of this file; if anyone can provide any other tangible evidence, I will gladly review the evidence if that person provides the evidence and the source in writing.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ashley Paulk", is written above the typed name.

Ashley Paulk, Sheriff



*Image 001 - Plan view of mat layout. Mat highlighted in red is the mat believed to be the one where the body was found. From the reference photos, it appears that there were 16 mats total - 10 yellow mats, 5 blue mats, and 1 black mat.*



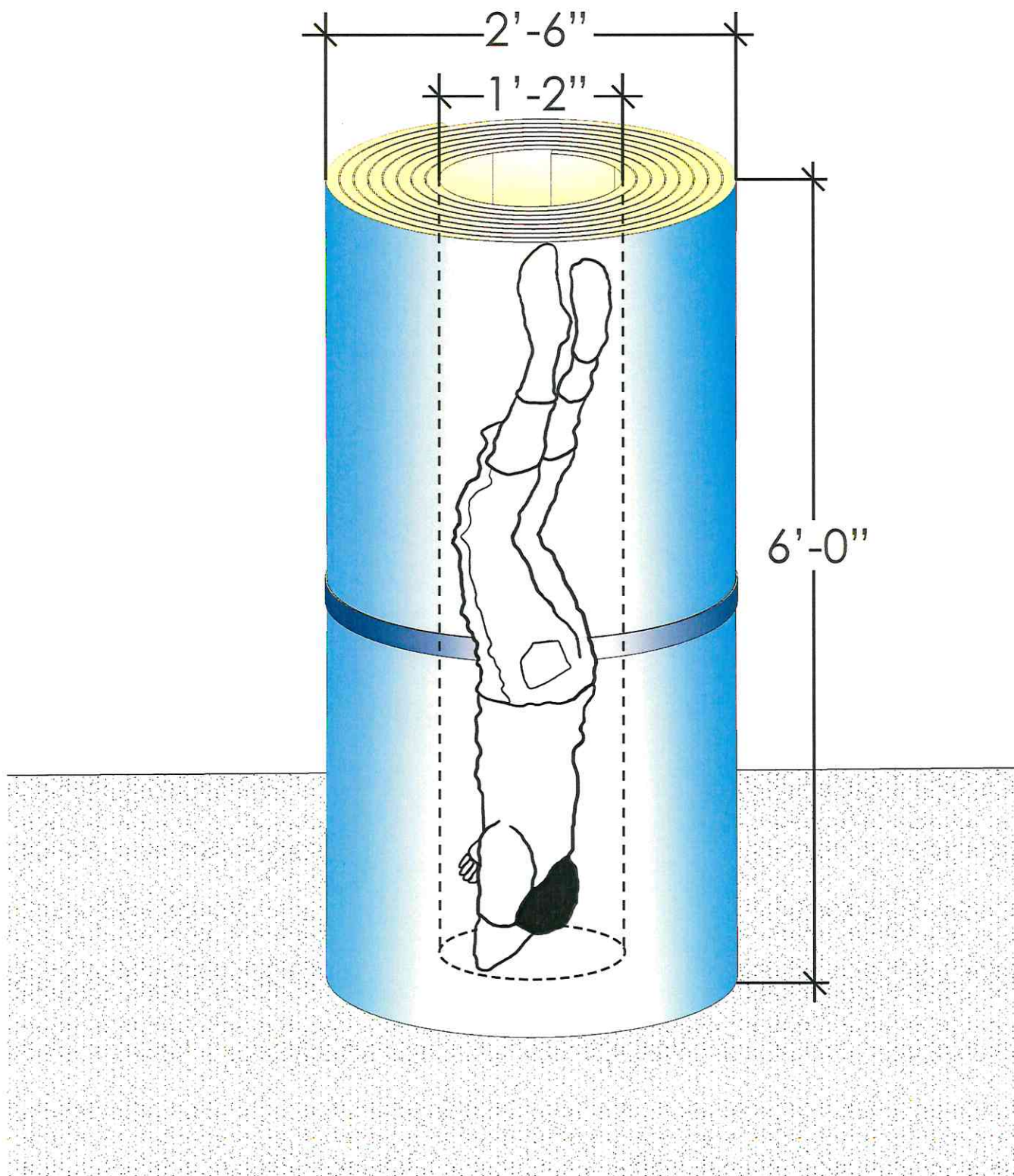
*Image 002 - Rough draft perspective rendering*



*Image 003 - Rough draft perspective rendering*



*Image 004 - Rough draft perspective rendering*





*Image 006 - Source image showing the three tier bleacher and location of some mats.*



*Image 007 - Verification of a three-tier bleacher*



*Image 008 - Image showing another angle of the mats*

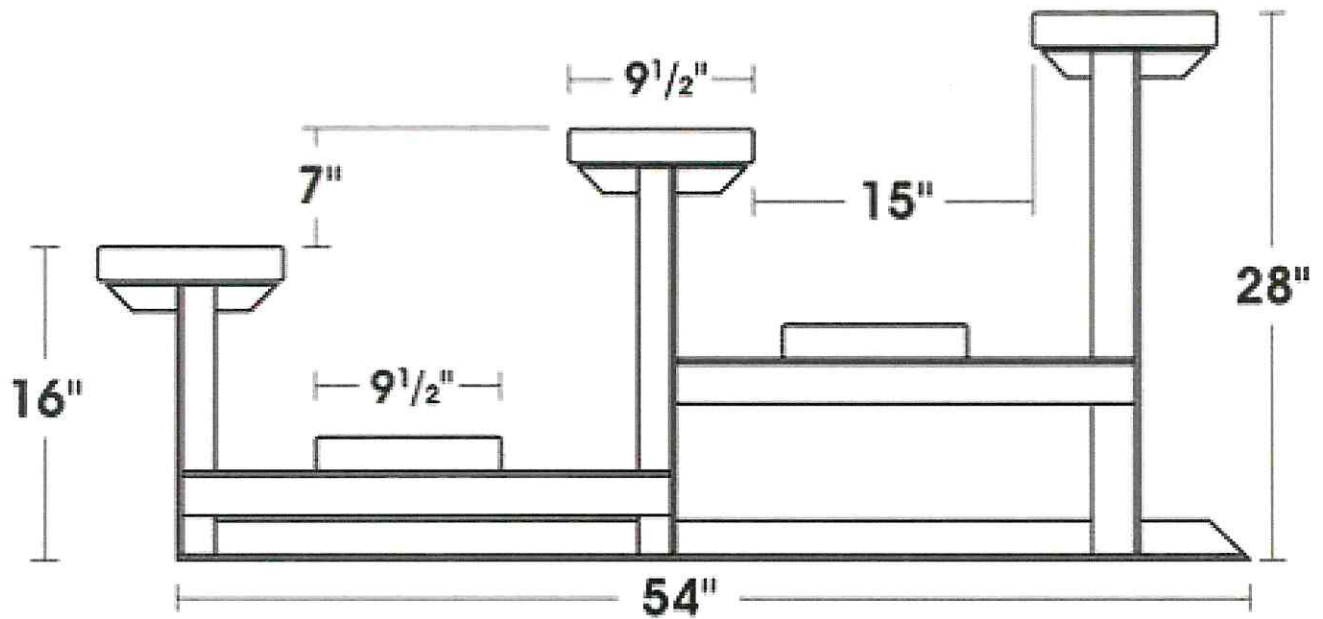


Image 009 - Elevation of three tier bleacher. Found at <https://www.uline.com/Product/Detail/H-4406/Benches/Aluminum-Bleachers-15-3-Rows>



Image 010 - Image of the Lowndes High School Gym showing the entire corner in question

