

## Witnesses: Officer hit student, then kept driving

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### *Police deny claims that she was gone for 3-5 minutes*

A Metro police sergeant did not immediately stop after striking a pedestrian early Friday morning, police and a lawyer for the family of the victim said yesterday.

However, there is disagreement about how long it took Sgt. Kim Gooch to make a U-turn and come back to the scene.

Witnesses said Gooch did not return for three to five minutes after she struck Middle Tennessee State University student Micah Jones, 23, as Jones was crossing Division Street to get into a cab, attorney Gary Blackburn said. Blackburn said he had spoken with several witnesses who had been at the scene.

Initial interviews show that Gooch braked hard after the impact, then continued on for a short way before making a U-turn and coming back, police spokesman Don Aaron said.

"They did not indicate she was gone as long as three to five minutes," he said, adding that the investigation was continuing and more witnesses would be interviewed.

A message for Gooch, left with her mother yesterday, was not returned. Gooch had not retained a lawyer from the Fraternal Order of Police, which provides legal services for member officers, Danny Hale, first vice president, said yesterday.

Jones remained in a coma yesterday, Blackburn said. Her family was taking it "day to day," as she remained in critical condition with severe head injuries.

On Thursday, Jones had just finished her first day as an intern for Island Bound Music and had gone to an event showcasing one of the company's musicians, said Melissa Wald, who recently taught Jones at MTSU.

"The whole day was a culmination of her dreams in the music business," her aunt, Paula Vandegriff of Virginia, said at a press conference at Blackburn's office yesterday afternoon.

After the show, Jones had gone out to celebrate her big day. She called friends and family all around the country from her cell phone up until about midnight to share her excitement, Vandegriff said.



Sgt. Kim Gooch, left, and Micah Jones

Jones left the Red Door Saloon in the Music Row area about 1 a.m., crossing Division Street toward a waiting cab at an intersection across the street, Blackburn said.

Police and Blackburn's account of the crash differ.

She made it across the westbound lane and halfway across the eastbound when she was struck "and went airborne," Blackburn said. According to police, Jones was about 3 feet from the curb when she was struck.

Gooch, a 19-year department veteran, appeared in television news footage walking around without handcuffs and drinking bottled water after the crash.

"At that point, the investigation was in progress, but she was not under arrest," Aaron said. "Unless there is overwhelming evidence of a crime, or a person is out of control, the response is not to put someone immediately in handcuffs."

Gooch's blood was drawn to be tested for alcohol about 2:30 a.m. Blackburn said that because the rate at which the body metabolizes alcohol is known, the elapsed time could be taken into account during the test.

Unless it was a massive quantity "like the Cumberland River," drinking water would not affect the outcome of a blood test, local defense attorney David Raybin said.

"A blood test is the fairest and most accurate" way to determine blood-alcohol levels, he said.

The results may take two weeks to be returned.

Blackburn called the police investigation into the accident thorough and professional.

Field sobriety tests given to Gooch showed "clues of impairment," police said. She was stripped of her arrest powers, badge and gun last week but will continue to work at the training academy during the investigation.

Jones' uncle, Karl Vandegriff, said he thought Gooch, who was off-duty at the time, should be held to a higher standard of conduct than others because of her profession.