

Former UK professional soccer player Dalian Atkinson dies after being hit with Taser

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Dalian Atkinson, a former professional soccer player, died after West Mercia police struck him with a Taser at 1:30 a.m. Monday.

During his professional career, from 1985-2001, Atkinson played for a number of leading clubs, including Ipswich Town, Sheffield Wednesday, Real Sociedad, Aston Villa and Manchester City. He is most remembered for scoring a magnificent solo goal for Aston Villa in 1992, awarded Goal of the Season for the inaugural year of soccer's Premier League.

Atkinson, 48, had been visiting his 85-year-old father, Ernest, at his home in Telford, Shropshire. From several accounts, Dalian Atkinson may have been arguing with his father in the period leading up to police arriving on the scene.

The police said they were responding to reports of concerns for a person's safety. Following the use of the Taser, which can discharge an electric shock of up to 50,000 volts, Atkinson was taken to the Princess Royal Hospital. His condition deteriorated and he had a cardiac arrest.

Ambulance crew and hospital staff tried to resuscitate Atkinson, but he was pronounced dead at the hospital 90 minutes after being stunned. Atkinson had an underlying health condition and had been undergoing dialysis treatment for kidney problems.

According to at least one witness, Atkinson suffered a brutal death at the hands of the police. Paula Quinn, who lives in a first-floor flat near the Atkinson property, described seeing Atkinson being stunned with the Taser a number of times by police and then being kicked as he stumbled towards police officers.

Quinn told BBC, "They were shouting and kicking so much all I could hear were the boots hitting him.

"And then the officer who released the Taser stepped back while the other officer still continued to kick and

then I could hear him shout to the other officer that was still kicking, 'Back off, back off, back off.'

"And then the officer with the Taser asked the gentleman to put his hands behind his back and did so probably two or three times and reactivated the Taser another four or five times after that."

Speaking after Atkinson's death, his nephew Fabian told the Daily Mail, "Nobody deserves being tasered in such a way without due care ..."

Asked why the police were called in the first place, Fabian said, "It was an argument, I don't know what it was for, but I think it was an argument between family. Apparently he stumbled and then they tasered him. This is one thing that has got me angry because of the way the police operated."

He added, "I know they [the police] will just push it under the carpet the best they can. I'm frustrated, annoyed, shocked and overwhelmed. They didn't need to use such excessive force."

Fabian said Dalian "had a few problems with drink," adding, "He was having dialysis for kidney problems. He was just getting himself back together with that and that is why his heart was weaker."

Fabian voiced his concern that medical assistance was not immediately on hand for his uncle, stating, "They need to, as soon as they deploy a Taser, they need to deploy an ambulance. As soon as, it should be mandatory. Because, how do they know, unnaturally putting volts through a body, how do they know they're going to survive that, eventually, in the long run, that they're not going to need any medical attention?"

Atkinson's death follows that in June of 43-year-old Spencer Beynon from Llanelli, in south Wales. Beynon, a former soldier with 15 years of service, had suffered from post traumatic stress disorder since leaving the army. He died after being stunned with a Taser by police.

Beynon had made a number of tours of Afghanistan and

Iraq and had witnessed a roadside bomb going off in Basra, killing some of his friends. This incident had left him traumatised and struggling to cope.

According to witness accounts, police arrived to find a man in a distressed state in the street and during an altercation with Benyon, a Taser was fired. He became unresponsive, an ambulance was called and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Deborah Coles, director of Inquest, which supports families of people who have lost relatives as a result of contact with police, said Benyon's death was "disturbing," with a "robust investigation" required that "provides his family with answers. The use of Tasers on vulnerable people is a matter of significant concern that has been linked to previous deaths."

The deaths of Atkinson and Benyon are being investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). The misnamed IPCC, founded in 2004, has participated for more than a decade in cover-up after cover-up of deaths in police custody.

The IPCC is currently looking into two inquest verdicts that have found police use of Tasers played a significant or material part in a death. This is on top of investigations it is carrying out into four deaths before which a Taser was discharged. One inquest was into the death of 23-year-old Jordan Begley, from Gorton, Manchester in July 2013, who died following the use of a Taser. Following the inquest, the IPCC were forced to take the unprecedented step of asking for a judicial review in order to quash its own investigation into Begley's death.

The investigation carried out by the IPCC, which was never published, cleared Greater Manchester Police of any blame for Begley's death. However, the findings of the inquest into the conduct of the police officers involved was not consistent with the findings of the IPCC investigation. The inquest carried out in July 2015 raised serious concerns about the use of a Taser and was damning in its findings against the police. Jurors accepted that an initial Taser shock had not killed Begley. However, they found that the Taser and restraint used against Begley "more than materially contributed" to a "package" of stressful factors leading to his cardiac arrest.

The inquest heard that Begley, a factory worker, had

offered minimal resistance to the police at the time and there had been no need to punch him a second time in what was termed a "distraction strike" as they handcuffed him.

In conclusion, the jury said that Begley had been left far too long in a position lying face down with his hands cuffed behind his back. It found that a police officer, Terence Donnelly, pulled the Taser trigger for eight seconds longer than was necessary. The jury found that police were more concerned for their own welfare than that of Begley.

Earlier this month an IPCC spokesman said in light of the inquest into Begley's death that it had "reviewed its investigation and decided to seek permission to quash its independent investigation report in order to ensure all the available evidence could be considered."

The spokesman said a judicial review had been granted, with a date to be set.

The latest tragedies only confirm that Tasers are a potentially lethal weapon. In the last decade in England and Wales, their use by police has been linked to 10 deaths. Figures show that the use of Tasers in England and Wales increased by 2 percent to the end of the 2015, with the police using the weapon 10,329 times overall.

Just between January 2014 and November 2015, police in England and Wales used Tasers on minors at least 407 times. This includes 57 times against children under the age of 14.



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