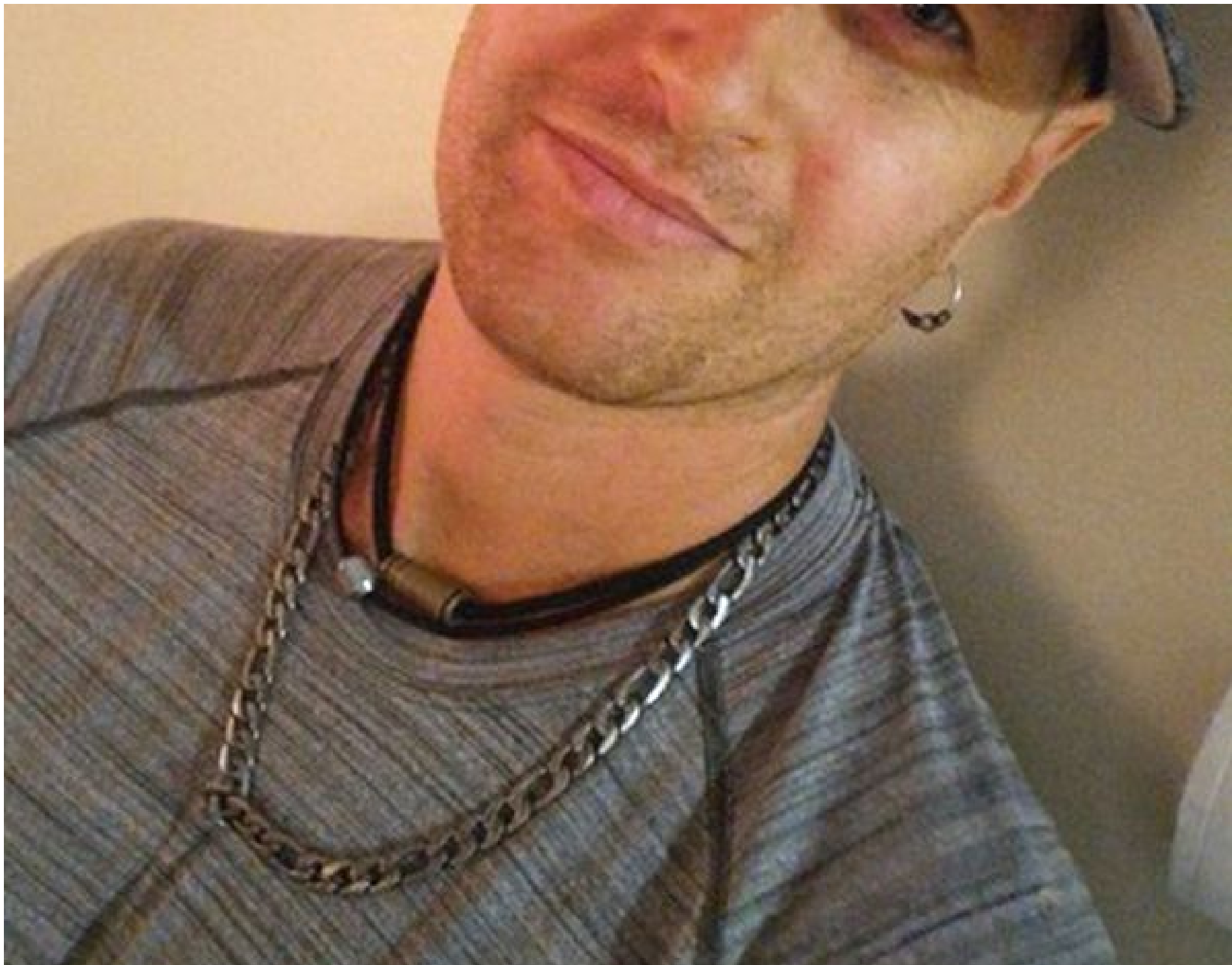


# Videos shed new light on police shooting of fleeing suspect, Juston Root

By **Dugan Arnett** and **Jeremy C. Fox** Globe Staff and Globe Correspondent, Updated August 26, 2020, 8:30 p.m.







Juston Root was shot and killed by police in Brookline. EVAN ROOT

Police body camera videos released Wednesday depicts the final, chaotic moments before five Boston officers and one state trooper opened fire on Juston Root near a Brookline shopping center in February.

The dozens of recordings, released by Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey's office in response to a records request from the Globe, do not show Root in the final moments before police open fire, and only one video captures the actual shooting — though it is largely obscured.

In it, however, multiple officers can be heard shouting instructions at Root, a 41-year-old with a long history of mental illness who had brandished a fake gun at an officer earlier in the day, in the moments before he was killed by police gunfire.

“Get down!” says a female officer wearing a body camera.

“Get on the [expletive] ground,” shouts another officer.

“Put your hands up! Stay down!” says a third officer, before a barrage of gunfire erupts.

The footage largely corroborates the details laid out in a wrongful death lawsuit filed earlier this month in US District Court in Boston by Root’s sister, Jennifer Root Bannon.

The suit names the City of Boston, five Boston police officers — Leroy Fernandes, Brenda Figueroa, David Godin, Joseph McMenamy, and Corey Thomas — and Massachusetts State Trooper Paul Conneely as defendants, and seeks a jury trial for seven allegations, including excessive use of force and negligent training and supervision.

In all, Boston police fired 31 rounds in roughly three seconds, according to the suit, and Root was stuck 26 times.

Sergeant Detective John Boyle, a Boston police spokesman, declined to comment on the footage, citing the department’s ongoing investigation. Lawyers representing Bannon also declined to comment.

According to a March report from the Norfolk district attorney’s office, which found the shooting to be justified, the incident began earlier that day outside Brigham and Women’s Hospital, where Root displayed what appeared to be a gun at an officer.

Officers opened fire, according to Morrissey’s report, striking Root as well as a valet in the area, though Root was able to escape to his car, a Chevy Volt, and leave.

Root led police on a four-mile chase across the city that ended when his vehicle crashed spectacularly near a Brookline shopping center. In the footage from a street camera, Root’s vehicle can be seen flying through an intersection after making contact with another vehicle. Alternate footage shows him struggling to exit the vehicle moments later.

An unnamed female witness included in the wrongful death suit said she rushed to help Root after she saw him struggling.

But the video doesn't appear to include the woman, or what Root was doing at the moment police opened fire.



Body camera footage of the police shooting of Juston Root in Brookline in February. NORFOLK DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

The body camera footage, however, does show the frazzled aftermath of the shooting, as countless officers descended on the area and multiple officers quickly begin to refer to the incident as “suicide by cop.”

A BB gun that Root was known to sometimes carry in a shoulder holster was reportedly found in mulch under his body, according to the wrongful death lawsuit, while a clear paintball gun was discovered in Root’s crashed vehicle.

In one video from the aftermath of the shooting, one officer says to another, “He [expletive] pulled it right out on me on the [expletive] sidewalk. I’m like, ‘[Expletive]!’”

Another officer approaches and asks if he is OK. He responds, “Yeah, I killed the mother[expletive].”

Though officers in the videos described seeing Root pull a gun, all six defendants said in their statements later, according to the lawsuit, that “at no time in Chestnut Hill did any of them see Mr. Root point or brandish a gun or any other type of weapon at them or anyone else.”

On multiple occasions, meanwhile, officers appear to warn each other that body cameras are still recording, while others provide warnings to the officers involved in the shooting not to speak about it.

In one video, a man who appears to be a supervisor approaches the female officer wearing the camera and a couple of other officers standing at the scene. After she informs him that she was involved in the shooting, he replies, “Don’t say nothing to nobody.”

In another video, a state trooper approaches two officers, and after a brief conversation, addresses the officer wearing the camera: “Just shut your [expletive] mouth. You got a rep coming?”

The officer wearing the camera responds, “I won’t talk.”

”You did nothing wrong. ... It was suicide by cop,” the state trooper says.

The officer wearing the camera begins telling a second officer what happened, saying, “We get here, the lady’s running up to him, ‘cause he ran—”

The second officer interrupts, gesturing to his body camera, and saying, “I’m still on, I’m still on.”

The first officer begins the story again, saying, “I’ll talk about—So, I saw the car, I said hey, I thought we lost him, I thought he turned off earlier, because I rammed him on Huntington. Everybody was kind of following him, so I came in, I just BOOM!”

Asked a moment later if Root had pulled a gun on officers, the first officer says he saw Root on the ground, moving, and a woman approaching him.

”He opens the thing, and he starts reaching for it, he’s got it right there,” the officer says. “He starts reaching for it on me. And that’s when, uh ...” The officer then lets out a groan.

Moments later, he walks onto the mulched area where Root was shot, approaching an officer standing over an object that appears to be a gun.

”Is it fake?” the first officer asks.

“Yeah,” someone responds.



*Tonya Alanez, Matt Rocheleau, and Evan Allen of the Globe Staff contributed to this report.*

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