

Thursday, June 14, 2001

EHS grad critical after jail incident

By KATHY CIOTOLA

Sun staff writer

A recent Eastside High School graduate and star football player was in critical condition at Shands at AGH on Wednesday night after an incident at the Alachua County jail.

Mark Lorenzo Burkett, 18, of 2721 NE 10th Terrace was arrested at 3:20 a.m. Wednesday after he bit a Gainesville Police officer, Officer Keith Kameg said.

Nearly 12 hours later, after an incident at the jail, Burkett was rushed to the hospital.

Burkett was a linebacker for the Eastside Rams and was on The Sun's All-Area football team.

Early Wednesday morning, police were trying to take Burkett to Meridian Behavioral Healthcare at the request of his mother, according to authorities.

His father was helping police walk Burkett to the car when Burkett suddenly head-butted his father and lunged at the officers, Kameg said.

Officers Guillermo Ramos, Mike Schentrup and Dontonya Smith were trying to handcuff Burkett when he bit Ramos' thumb and flailed at Schentrup and Smith, Kameg said.

Ramos suffered serious tendon and muscle damage to his thumb.

Burkett was arrested on charges of domestic battery and three counts of aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer, Kameg said.

He was brought to the jail by Gainesville Police. At 8 a.m., detention officers tried to bring him to first appearance in a jail courtroom, Alachua County Sheriff's Sgt. Jim Troiano said. Burkett threatened to hurt the officers if they came into his cell, Troiano said. Officers used a Taser gun on him after he refused to get on the ground and were able to subdue him and take him to first appearance.

The judge later ordered jail officials to take a blood sample from Burkett, but when they tried at 3 p.m., he fought their efforts, Troiano said.

"He became combative and resisted actions of the detention and medical staff," Troiano said.

Troiano said he couldn't detail what happened in the jail cell because of an ongoing investigation, but he said that jail officials realized Burkett was unresponsive and performed CPR on him. Burkett was taken by ambulance to Shands at AGH, where he was in critical condition late Wednesday night.

Two jail officials were injured during the incident and were treated at local hospitals, Troiano said.

"We were dealing with a man today that showed little regard for his own safety and little regard for the health and safety of three GPD officers and two detention guards," Troiano said. "He showed a propensity for violence three different times."

Burkett wasn't taken to Meridian as originally planned because the jail has resources to evaluate an inmate's mental health, Troiano said. Troiano did not know if a mental health official saw Burkett at the jail.

Burkett had just graduated from Eastside High School and has a college scholarship, Troiano said. Burkett's criminal history includes an arrest in May 2000 for resisting an officer, trespassing and possession of marijuana.

Wednesday's incident comes two months after a grand jury cleared the Sheriff's Office of any criminal wrongdoing in the death of another jail inmate.

John Tennyson Smith, 47, died July 18 from head injuries he received July 12 after he was arrested on charges of aggravated stalking for threatening to kill his wife and a friend.

The Sheriff's Office will conduct a criminal and internal investigation into Wednesday's incident.

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ALACHUA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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For Immediate Release:

Today's Date:

Prepared By: Sergeant James Troiano

Release #: 2001-

Case #:

Incident Date:

Incident Time:

Incident Location:

The Alachua County Sheriff's Office is investigating the injury of a jail inmate.

At approximately 3:50 a.m., Mark Lorenzo Burkett, B/M, 11/12/82, was arrested by the Gainesville Police Department following a violent attack on a family member and three Gainesville Police officers. Burkett was later booked into the Alachua County Jail at approximately 4:10 a.m. on the charges of domestic battery, aggravated battery of a law enforcement officer, and two counts of battery of a law enforcement officer.

At approximately 8:20 a.m., detention staff attempted to take Burkett to first appearance. Burkett threatened jail staff with violence if they entered his jail cell. Jail staff attempted to calm Burkett, but he refused to cooperate. Burkett was informed that if he did not cooperate with their requests, he would be restrained with a Taser, a device that delivers an electro-muscular disruption designed to temporarily incapacitate the person. Burkett refused to cooperate and was restrained by the Taser. Burkett was handcuffed and taken to first appearance without further incident.

Burkett made first appearance shortly after 9:00 a.m. and was being held for processing when detention staff and medical personnel received a court order to draw blood from Burkett. At approximately 3:00 p.m., Burkett became combative and resisted the lawful attempts of jail staff. After a brief confrontation in his cell, jail staff noticed that Burkett was unresponsive. CPR was immediately administered to the inmate. Burkett was quickly transported to Shands at AGH and has been listed in critical condition.

Detectives and internal inspectors have now launched a thorough criminal and administrative review of this case. Additional information will be made available as this investigation continues.

<http://starlink.alachuasheriff.org/pib/2001%20Releases/releases/June/2001-086.html>