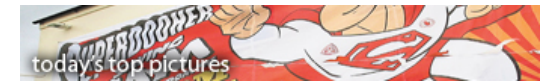


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## McIlveen murder case opens to packed court

By Maeve Connolly

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THE trial of seven people charged in connection with the murder of Ballymena teenager Michael McIlveen has begun.

A jury of eight women and four men was sworn in at Coleraine Crown Court yesterday and told that the case could run for several months.

The court heard that 159 witnesses could be called during the trial of the six men and one youth, who are all from the Ballymena area.

Six of the accused are charged with murder and causing an affray.

They are: Jeff Colin Lewis (19) from Rossdale, Mervyn Wilson Moon (20) of Douglas Terrace, Christopher Francis Kerr (22) of Carnduff Drive, Aaron Cavana Wallace (20) from Moat Road, Christopher Andrew McLeister (18) of Knock Crescent, and a 17-year-old who cannot be identified because of his age. A seventh, Paul Edward David Henson (18) from Condiere Avenue, is charged with affray and criminal damage. Jeff Lewis and the youth are also charged with criminal damage.

Mr Kerr, Mr Moon and Mr Lewis have been on remand since their arrest more than two years ago, while the others were released on bail in the months following the fatal attack.

Michael (15), who was known as 'Micky-Bo', died in hospital on Monday May 8 2006 from head injuries.

Prosecution barrister John Orr QC gave the jury a brief outline of the case, stating that the events which led to the Michael's death began in a car park off the Larne Link road in Ballymena and involved two groups – Michael McIlveen and two friends and a larger group which included the defendants.

Mr Orr said the two groups "came from two sides of the divide".

"The three youths were Catholic and the larger group were Protestants," he said.

The court heard how CCTV footage showed the young people having a conversation before Michael, pictured, and a friend were chased "through a number of small housing estate areas" ending up in a car park behind Cam-eron's shop on Broughshane Street.

Mr Orr said Michael was attacked in a "dog-legged shaped" alleyway beside the car park but his friend managed to get into a house.

The schoolboy was taken home by

a friend and his family called an

ambulance which took him to Antrim Area Hospital where he was put on life support and later pronounced dead, with "the injury to the brain being the cause of death".

The seven defendants, all wearing suits as they appeared in the dock


yesterday, spoke only to confirm their names and that they were ready for the trial to begin.

With each having at least one solicitor and two barristers representing them in the courtroom, there were not enough seats even for the counsel and so the families of the accused had to wait outside.

The extended McIlveen family, including Michael's mother Gina, watched proceedings from inside the courtroom. The trial continues.

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