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'Attackers laughing' as they left Michael

By Maeve Connolly

02/10/08

THE gang who allegedly chased and attacked Ballymena teenager Michael McIlveen were seen "laughing" as they walked away, his murder trial has heard.

The court heard that shortly after the assault on Michael, pictured, a young girl met the gang.

"I just seen all them ones walking back down laughing," she said.

The witness, who cannot be identified because of her age, said there were "10 or 15" of them and named one as Christopher Francis Kerr (22), from Carnduff Drive, who is accused of murder.

Watching her video-taped police interview Antrim Crown Court also heard her say that Mr Kerr had been among the group of young Protestants who had pursued Michael and two other Catholic teenagers.

Earlier this week a different witness told the court that Mr Kerr had shown him a baseball bat up to four weeks before the fatal attack which he claimed to have for protection and "for giving Catholics a beating".

Michael McIlveen died on May 8 2006 from head injuries after being allegedly beaten with a baseball bat and kicked more than 60 times.

Mervyn Wilson Moon (20) from Douglas Terrace has pleaded guilty to murder and will be sentenced at the end of the trial of six other people from the town.

Five of the accused are charged with murder and one faces lesser charges.

Under cross examination yesterday the 17-year-old girl acknowledged that she had not mentioned Mr Kerr until asked about him by a police officer, 74 minutes into the 81-minute recorded interview.

A second witness, Sarah Ann McCormick, said that when Michael and his friends arrived at a cinema car park on the night of the attack she did not know them but someone in the crowd of "about 20" said "there's taigs coming" and named two, including Michael.

The court heard how Jeff Colin Lewis (22), from Rossdale, had asked Michael to "go fair digs" with him but Michael had refused.

Questioned by the prosecution Ms McCormick confirmed that she had heard Mr Kerr being urged to hit one of the Catholic friends and that the target might have been Michael.

The 19-year-old said Mr Kerr had not done so and that some girls told him he could not hit the teenager because, she thought, "he was too young".

Ms McCormick named Mr Lewis and Mr Kerr as having been among a group of "four or five" who ran after Michael and his friends.

She also told the court that she later saw the group together with Moon who had walked for a short distance before joining the chase.

However, under cross examination from Mr Kerr's lawyer the witness conceded that it was

difficult to be certain about who had been running because it had been dark.

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