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McIlveen accused 'covered up beating with distraction'

By Staff Reporter

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A teenage girl who had been attending a house party outside which Ballymena schoolboy Michael McIlveen was the victim of a sectarian attack, told detectives she felt "guilty" because the 15-year-old later died.

In a video-taped interview Nuala Knowles told police: "It made me feel guilty, we were in there enjoying, not knowing what went on, we couldn't have helped and any of them couldn't have helped stop it."

The tape was screened at the Antrim Crown Court trial of six young Ballymena men who face charges arising out of the murder of the schoolboy who died from head injuries on May 8 2006, the day after he was attacked in an alley behind houses in Granville Drive.

During the hour-long interview, Ms Knowles claimed she twice saw one of the accused, Aaron Cavana Wallace (20), running past the back gate of the house where the party had been and that she had seen a second accused, 19-year-old Jeff Colin Lewis running past once.

The teenager also claimed she had seen Mr Wallace from Moat Road attacking the gate and that later he had "stopped and stared" through the open gate before running off, and that she had spotted Mr Lewis from Rossdale running past the gate with possibly something up his sleeve.

Ms Knowles further claimed that those involved in the attack had also tried to cover-up what they were doing by setting up a distraction by kicking at the garden gate.

She claimed the back gate was being smashed, "so no-one would hear the shouts of them hitting Michael so, it was as if they were trying to cause a distractions so no-one could get out".

The teenager said that as she stood in the house, smoking a cigarette, she heard "screaming" coming from the side of the house and had wanted to get outside to see what was going on but the doors had been locked and no one was allowed out.

Later under cross-examination from defence QC Richard Weir for Mr Lewis, the now 18-year-old agreed she was not sure if he was carrying anything, but refuted suggestions she was mistaken in her identification.

When questioned by lawyer Stephen Law for Mr Wallace, Ms Knowles maintained it was "Aaron Wallace, he stopped, stared and ran off", but later agreed that his name "had come up in discussions" before making her statement and it was "therefore easy to name him".

The jury also heard evidence from Sean O'Hara who told John Orr QC, prosecuting, that he had been in the alley behind the house just before the gate was attacked and had seen Michael McIlveen "squaring up to some fellow" and that there was a "bit of slabbering going on".

A short time later one of his friends ran up and warned him and others of "a load of boys" and they had all ran back into the garden.

He also told Mr Orr that while he seemed to recognise one of the accused, 22-year-old Christopher Francis

Kerr from Carnduff Drive, from the type of jumper he was wearing, he was not sure if it had been Mr Kerr.

On trial for murder are: a 17-year-old who cannot be named for legal reasons, Mr Lewis, Mr Kerr, Mr Wallace and Christopher Andrew McLeister (18), from Knockeen Crescent.

A sixth defendant, 18-year-old Paul Edward David Henson of Condiere Avenue, denies charges of affray and criminal damage on the night of the alleged attack.

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