

## Police: 'Jena Six' teen, Bell, did shoot himself

By James Wright  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) — Mychal Bell, a teen convicted in the "Jena Six" beating case shot himself in the chest with a .22 caliber firearm and was taken to a hospital in Monroe, La., on Dec. 29, according to the police.

Monroe Police Sgt. Cassandra Wooten told the Associated Press that the wound was not life-threatening.

The reported shooting took place days after Bell's arrest Dec. 24 for shoplifting, resisting arrest and simple assault.

Wooten said she believed Bell was "upset over the [shoplifting] incident... and didn't want to be in the news again," she told AP.

Bell was one of a group of Black teenagers who once faced attempted murder charges in the 2006 beating of a White classmate at Jena High School.

The charges against all of the defendants were reduced after widespread national criticism and a 20,000-person march on the tiny central Louisiana town, the larg-



MYCKAL BELL

est civil rights march in decades.

Bell eventually pleaded to a juvenile charge of second-degree battery and has been living in a foster home in Monroe and attending school.

One of Bell's attorneys in the assault case didn't immediately return a call seeking comment on the recent shoplifting case.

James Wright writes for the *Afro-American Newspapers*.

## Two Black men among 6 competing to return GOP

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans, who lost control of the White House and Congress in the past two elections, must decide whether to give party chairman Mike Duncan a chance to reverse the losing streak or select one of his five challengers to chart a new path.

The party will have no natural standard-bearer when President George W. Bush leaves office this month, and failed GOP presidential nominee John McCain isn't close to the Republican National Committee.

So there is no one Republican in a position to steer the party to a winning formula after back-to-back shellackings.

As a result, this year's race for party chairman has potentially long-lasting consequences for young GOP politicians and legions of rank-and-file Republicans.

The next GOP chairman will have a high-profile platform to ready the party for the 2010 midterm elections and beyond. To do so, he will need to work closely with Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell, House GOP leader John Boehner, and any number of Republicans considering a 2012 presidential run.

"What the RNC needs now is a capable, calm, steady hand at the helm, because that person will need to coordinate with those three power centers that will define what the Republican Party is all about," said former chairman Rich Bond.

The basic tasks include raising money, recruiting candidates, refreshing the party's image, crafting a message, and responding to the incoming Democratic administration and Congress.

This week, Duncan and the challengers — former Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael Steele, former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell, South Carolina GOP chairman Katon Dawson, Michigan GOP chairman Saul Anuzis and former Tennessee GOP chairman Chip Saltsman — were in Washington for two candidate forums.

With so many candidates, Republicans say it's all but certain no one would get a majority of the votes on the first ballot if the election were held now. But the RNC, which heard the candidates Wednesday, won't vote until Jan. 28.

So far, they have waged a low-key campaign, save for Saltsman who drew protests when he sent committee members a CD featuring a 2007 parody song called "Barack the Magic Negro."

Duncan is casting himself as an experienced incumbent while also arguing that he can bring change. The longtime party insider from Kentucky was chosen by Bush two years ago and stayed on when McCain was nominated.

Under Duncan, the committee brought in more than \$400 million over two years — a record — and made a heavy investment in technology while updating its voter database.

But critics argue the party apparatus under Duncan was slow-to-evolve and simply served as a mouthpiece for the Bush administration — although the national committee of the party in power traditionally takes that role.

"We did have accomplishments at the RNC, but we've got to move forward" and rebuild the party, Duncan said Monday at an Americans for Tax Reform forum.

Duncan even criticized the Bush administration, labeling the president's conduct of the Iraq war as his biggest mistake. Other candidates raised issues like the Wall Street bailout, soaring government spending, Hurricane Katrina, and the inability to reform immigration and Social Security.

Steele and Blackwell, two of the GOP's most prominent Blacks, would bring diversity to a party long criticized for lacking it. Dawson and Anuzis are among the most active and vocal state party chairmen and, like Saltsman, would bring local organizing experience to GOP headquarters.

All six sound similar.

All promise a new approach and vow to compete everywhere, including Democratic states the GOP usually ignores. That's reminiscent of Democratic Party chairman Howard Dean's 50-state strategy that proved successful in 2008.

All say they are big fans of former President Ronald Reagan and advocate a return to traditional tenets of the

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## Report: Cincinnati police have improved since riots

CINCINNATI (AP) — The Cincinnati Police Department has made significant progress in changing practices and building community relationships since race riots stunned the city in 2001, a court-appointed monitor said in his final report released Tuesday.

The report wraps up a six-year review of police procedures, policies, training and record keeping. It resulted from an agreement with the Justice Department a year after the riots and from a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and Black activists who claimed 30 years of harassment by police.

The report was expected in October but was delayed when monitor Saul Green was appointed deputy mayor of Detroit in a shake-up of that city's government. His report said Cincinnati's police reform effort was one of the most ambitious ever attempted — and one of the most successful.

"The parties' performance under the agreements were initially halting and defensive," the report said. "With time and the emergence of impressive leadership throughout the Cincinnati community, significant compliance with the agreements were achieved resulting in the Cincinnati collaborative being one of the most suc-

cessful police reform efforts ever undertaken in this country."

ACLU attorney Scott Greenwood credits the success of the reform to the early and continued involvement of community members and patrol officers to determine what the people of Cincinnati wanted.

"The police department in 2008, and going into '09, is a very different department than when we filed the lawsuit," he said, and has set a "gold standard" for policing nationwide.

"Cincinnati is now a model, it can be a model and should be a model," he said.

"It isn't an overnight fix, it isn't cheap, it can't be easily copied by every community, but there are aspects of what we've done that can be copied anywhere in the country."

A message seeking comment was left Tuesday evening for Police Chief Thomas Streicher Jr.

Green had indicated at a court hearing in August that his final report would be favorable, and U.S. District Judge Susan Dlott, who appointed Green, said she expected to accept it.

The main component of the reform program is known as Community Problem-Oriented Policing, which required numerous new policies and procedures, includ-

ing training and record keeping.

"The city of Cincinnati is now in a very different situation than it was in 2002," the report concluded. "The CPD has improved its training, its policies and procedures, its investigations of uses of force and citizen complaints, its risk management and its accountability."

The report noted continuing efforts to improve relations between police and the community, particularly the African-American community.

The 2001 riots came after the fatal shooting of an unarmed Black man by a White police officer who was trying to make an arrest.

The monitoring was to have lasted five years, but the parties agreed last year to add another year to make the transition complete. The president of the Cincinnati Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has said that monitoring should continue.

"This report documents what went right, what went wrong and what is still to be accomplished. We hope it will serve as a resource for other communities that face the complex challenge of producing healthy and productive police-community relationships and effective public safety," Green wrote.



### LIVING HISTORY

President George W. Bush poses with President-elect Barack Obama and former presidents (from left) George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter on Wednesday in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. Obama asked for the meeting.