

Suspects in beating go to court

Gang-related attack leaves teen in coma

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One by one, five suspects in the beating of a 17-year-old Olympic Heights High School student marched into the Palm Beach County Jail's courtroom on Saturday.

Some had parents and family there to watch. Some brought attorneys, others relied on the public defender. All had shaved heads or close-cropped hair.

None were released by County Court Judge Elizabeth Maass.

"They all committed the same thing. They kicked my son, stomped on my son," Edward Pymm said after the hearings, his voice rising in anger and eyes swollen from all-night vigils at his son's hospital bedside.

The stomping was so forceful that Joey Pymm was left with "a footprint on his face," said Lillian McGrath, a family friend from New York.

On Saturday, Omar Botina, 20, Aaron Hemlepp, 19, and Serge Duron, 18, were ordered held without bail at the Palm Beach County Jail. Two other suspects, ages 16 and 17, who are not named because they are juveniles, were returned to detention until a hearing on Tuesday.

The five, plus two others, have been charged with aggravated battery, a charge upgraded to a first-degree felony because the attack was gang-related, according to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

The 17-year-old is accused of firing a gun to prevent rescue of the beating victim and faces firearm charges.

Joseph Gautier, 18, and a 15-year-old, who both appeared in court on Friday, are also behind bars; Gautier is being held on \$20,000 bail.

The seven are accused of beating Pymm at South Inlet Park in Boca Raton last Sunday; Pymm remains in a coma at Boca Raton Community Hospital.

About 18 to 20 gang members attacked Pymm when he tried to rescue a female friend from harassment, according to witnesses and the arrest report.

The attorneys for most of the five suspects on Saturday argued that the arrest report was a fill-in-the-name affair that didn't distinguish one suspect from another.

"Except the lineup, where he was identified," Maass said when the argument was used for Duron.

The most physically dominant suspect was Hemlepp, with a shaved head and red goatee, who towered over the courtroom as he stood by his attorney, Kenneth Lipman.

When Lipman asked that bail be set, Assistant State Attorney Mark Eissey argued against it.

"There is a real danger to the community if this individual is released. Witnesses are being threatened," Eissey said. "Unfortunately, it may become a homicide."

Edward Pymm said witnesses to the beating have been receiving telephone calls, and when they an-

Man, four teens charged in attack held without bail

swer, only the name of the gang is said before the connection is broken.

"The community is scared. The children are scared," Edward Pymm said. "They operate by intimidation, by group intimidation."

He singled out Hemlepp, at 6-foot-4 and about 300 pounds. Joey Pymm is 5-foot-10 and 165 pounds.

During the proceedings, Edward Pymm and son Christopher sat quietly across the aisle from the parents of the 16-year-old suspect.

The 16-year-old's attorney argued that the arrest report didn't describe anything his client might have done.

"There were no specifics alleged. It could have been any school [student]," said Joseph Atterbury, who wanted the teen released into his father's care so he

could return to classes at Spanish River High School.

The teen has been arrested previously on a trespassing charge but adjudication was withheld. Botina, who turned 20 on Saturday, also had a criminal charge on his record. He had been on probation for burglary of a vehicle.

After the hearing, Atterbury denied that the 16-year-old had ever belonged to a gang, saying the Sheriff's Office was looking for gang-related tattoos.

"My client does not have any tattoos," he said. "We plan to vigorously contest any such allegations [that he was a gang member]."

None of the suspects' parents or family members spoke to the judge at Saturday's hearing.

A man who answered the phone at the 16-year-old's house on Saturday, when asked about the youth's arrest, said, "We have no comment on that, none at all."

A woman who answered the Hemlepp's phone also declined to comment.

Parents of the other suspects could not be reached for comment.

All live in and around the Boca Raton area.

A man who lived on Northwest 32nd Avenue, in Hemlepp's neighborhood, said the suspect had a reputation for being "rebellious."

"He did his own thing," said the neighbor, who requested anonymity. "I just know he was kind of wild."

With his intimidating looks, he came across as "a guy you wouldn't even want to talk to," he said. "He didn't seem very friendly."

He said he had seen Hemlepp hanging out in pool halls in town but did not know whether he belonged to a gang. He said Hemlepp's parents described their son to him once as "a difficult boy."

But a neighbor who lived across the street from Hemlepp when his family had a home on Northwest 35th Lane four years ago said the suspect left no bad impressions on her.

"He never caused any problem that I know of," said the woman, who also did not want to be named. "I watched him grow up. I don't have anything bad to say about him."