

METRO

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Suspect in 2 Killings Charged in Slaying Of D.C. Jail Inmate

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A D.C. jail inmate awaiting trial in two earlier slayings has been charged with the Dec. 11 fatal stabbing of another detainee during a dinner dispute over a carton of milk, District police said yesterday.

Dominic Jones, 21, who already was facing two first-degree murder charges, was charged Tuesday with first-degree murder while armed in the stabbing of Givon Pendleton, 24, police and corrections officials said. Pendleton was being held in the jail on charges of burglary and possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

According to D.C. Superior Court records, Pendleton suffered nine stab wounds, and the D.C. Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined that the cause of death was perforation of the heart, lung and stomach.

On the night of the killing, which occurred about 7:30 p.m., Jones was detailed to help dispense meals and beverages to inmates in the Southeast 1 cellblock. Jones told investigators that the fight erupted after Pendleton took some milk from him, according to court records. Jones said he threw the first punch but stabbed Pendleton in self-defense after noticing that he had a sharp object in his hand, according to the records.

Jones, who has been held at the jail since April 19, 2001, is scheduled to go to trial Feb. 24 on the earlier murder charges, which stem from shootings, according to authorities.

The killing of Pendleton, the first at the Southeast Washington jail in nearly five years, occurred four days before Mikal Gaither, 23, a pretrial detainee held on charges of possession of and intent to distribute cocaine, was stabbed in the neck while on a walkway in the Northeast 3 cellblock. He died the next day. The night before Gaither was stabbed, an inmate was slashed on the face in the Southeast 2 cellblock.

Police have not filed charges in the two other stabbings. They have said the three stabbings do not appear to be related.

After the Gaither stabbing Dec. 14, D.C. Department of Corrections officials put the jail on an indefinite lock-

down, restricting the movements and activities of inmates while police and the agency's internal affairs unit investigated. The violence has renewed concerns about whether the jail can operate safely above a court-ordered population limit of 1,674 that was lifted in June after 17 years. Yesterday's inmate count stood at 2,347.

Corrections spokesman Darryl J. Madden said the heightened security is gradually being eased. The jail is no longer in a lockdown mode but is operating under what is called "controlled movement," he said.

On Dec. 23, the jail reinstated standard social visitation from noon to 7 p.m. on weekdays. Three days later, officials started allowing one hour a day of out-of-cell recreation for the jail's general population. On Monday, they allowed two hours of such recreation daily. Madden said the next phase will involve returning most of the jail's operations to normal, though he said it was unclear whether the 10 hours a day of out-of-cell recreation will resume.

In the Pendleton case, one witness to the stabbing told investigators that Pendleton took some milk from a table in the dining room after Jones—a member of the Muslim Brotherhood group—objected by telling him the milk "was reserved for the Muslims," court papers said. The witness said Pendleton then made a derogatory remark about Muslims and Jones called him into the nearby gym.

"When the decedent entered the gym, the witness observed the defendant [Jones] with something up his sleeve," court documents said. The witness "then saw the defendant punch the decedent and then saw him stab him multiple times with a knife. This witness never saw anything in the hands of the decedent and never saw the decedent inflict any blows."

Staff writer Arthur Santana contributed to this report.