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Justice Dept. to Open Investigation Into Kenosha Shooting

Protesters have poured into the Wisconsin city's streets after the shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black father who was partially paralyzed after a white officer fired at him in front of his children.



Black Lives Matter supporters march through Kenosha Tuesday during unrest following the police shooting of Jacob Blake. Credit...Alyssa Schukar for The New York Times

By Julie Bosman and Sarah Mervosh
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KENOSHA, Wis. — The Justice Department on Wednesday announced a civil rights investigation into the police shooting of a Black man in Kenosha, Wis., as new details emerged in the case, a white teenager who confronted demonstrators was arrested in connection with two deaths, and protests spread to athletes in three pro sports leagues.

Protesters have poured into Kenosha's streets to decry the shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black father who was partially paralyzed after a white officer fired at him in front of his children. The authorities released new details of the case on Wednesday that gave a clearer picture of why police officers confronted Mr. Blake, who they said had a knife.

Amid the ire over the shooting of Mr. Blake, some in Kenosha have torched buildings, and the authorities have fired tear gas in an effort to clear the streets. Counterprotesters have also emerged, and gunfire broke out along one crowded, dark

street late Tuesday, sending bystanders fleeing into parking lots and screaming in terror.

The violence that broke out came as demonstrators scuffled with a group of men carrying long guns who said they were protecting the area from looting. The authorities were investigating whether the white teenager who was arrested on Wednesday, identified as Kyle Rittenhouse, 17, was part of a vigilante group. His social media accounts appeared to show an intense affinity for guns, law enforcement and President Trump.

The fatal shooting followed a tense night of standoffs between the police and demonstrators and escalated a situation that had drawn the attention of Mr. Trump, who is in the third day of the Republican National Convention and has sought to portray Democratic cities as rife with violence and crime. Protests over the shooting of Mr. Blake also expanded to sports, where the N.B.A. postponed multiple playoff games on Wednesday after the Milwaukee Bucks boycotted their matchup with the Orlando Magic.

Mr. Rittenhouse was arrested in Antioch, Ill., and faces a charge of first-degree intentional homicide, according to a court document from Lake County, Ill. Antioch is about 30 minutes southwest of Kenosha, just over the Illinois line. Two men, a 26-year-old and a 36-year-old from Kenosha County, were killed, the authorities said, and a third person was injured.

Kenosha has become the latest flashpoint in a summer of unrest that began with the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and set off soul searching across the country as well as protests, some of which have turned violent.

Mr. Trump tweeted on Wednesday that he planned to deploy federal law enforcement officials to Kenosha and that Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, had agreed to the help.

“I will be sending federal law enforcement and the National Guard to Kenosha, WI to restore LAW and ORDER!” he wrote on Twitter. He also wrote: “We will NOT stand for looting, arson, violence, and lawlessness on American streets,”

Mr. Trump is fighting for support in swing states like Wisconsin, which had surprised many in 2016 by giving him its electoral votes.

Mr. Trump’s campaign also issued a statement distancing itself from Mr. Rittenhouse, saying he had “nothing to do with our campaign.”



Two members of the Wisconsin National Guard talk to a police officer, left, during a third night of unrest following the shooting of Jacob Blake by police officers, in Kenosha, Wis., Tuesday. Credit...Tannen Maury/EPA, via Shutterstock

Mr. Evers on Wednesday announced that his office was sending more members of the Wisconsin National Guard to Kenosha — the numbers have grown to 500 from about 125 earlier in the week — as protests have intensified. On Tuesday, Mr. Evers declined federal assistance from the White House, his office said, but additional conversations took place on Wednesday.

It was uncertain what federal assistance Mr. Evers had been offered and details of any federal involvement were uncertain late Wednesday, though an official in Mr. Evers's office indicated that some level of help had been accepted.

“The federal government is planning to assist in facilitating conversations with other state partners and provide F.B.I. support to our state response,” Britt Cudaback, Mr. Evers's deputy communications director, said in a written statement.

Officials on Wednesday for the first time identified the Kenosha police officer who fired at Mr. Blake as Rusten Sheskey, who has been with the department for seven years. Officer Sheskey and two other officers who were present at the shooting have been placed on administrative leave as the Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation investigates the case, which officials provided new details of on Wednesday evening.

Officers were responding to a domestic complaint on Sunday afternoon when they attempted to arrest Mr. Blake, state officials said. They used a Taser on Mr. Blake but it failed to stop him, and Officer Sheskey then fired his gun seven times into Mr. Blake's back.

According to state officials, Mr. Blake admitted that he possessed a knife; a knife was later recovered from the driver's-side floorboard of Mr. Blake's car. There were no other weapons in the vehicle.

The Wisconsin attorney general, Josh Kaul, said he could not comment on the role of the knife or whether officers instructed Mr. Blake to drop it before the officer opened fire.

Ben Crump, a lawyer for Mr. Blake's family, said in a statement that Mr. Blake had not posed any threat to police officers on Sunday, and denied that he was carrying a knife. "Jacob did nothing to provoke police," Mr. Crump said. "He was a great father and was only intending to get his children out of a volatile situation."

Michael D. Graveley, the Kenosha County district attorney, said the prosecutor's office would decide whether criminal charges were warranted once the Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation completes its inquiry. "I ask for as much patience as our times allow," he said.

Until Wednesday, much of what was known of the shooting was from video footage taken by a neighbor that showed Mr. Blake being shot in the back as he tried to get into his car.

Kenosha officials vowed not to let the violence that has unfolded since Sunday continue. They announced that a curfew, which has been moved up to 7 p.m., would extend through the weekend. "It's something we have to do," Sheriff David Beth said.

On Tuesday night, loosely organized demonstrations had taken place in a shifting, hourslong standoff between the police and protesters. Early in the night, protesters assembled outside a newly erected metal barrier protecting a county courthouse downtown and threw water bottles, rocks and fireworks at officers.

The police responded with tear gas and rubber bullets, repeatedly warning the crowd through a bullhorn that they were violating the city curfew of 8 p.m. and risking arrest. The crowd was eventually forced out of the park with tear gas and onto city streets, where the standoff continued.

Many protesters left the area, but others lingered and walked to a gas station several blocks away. There, a group of men with guns stood outside, promising to protect the property and verbally sparring with the arriving protesters. As the night stretched on, the gas station became a tense gathering spot, with bystanders watching from parked cars and people milling around in the street, arguing and occasionally shoving one another.

Police officers had crept closer to the area in armored trucks, urging the people who were still there to go home.

Then, near midnight, shots rang out.

Video footage from the scene of the shooting appears to show Mr. Rittenhouse running and then firing his gun, striking a man in the head. He then flees and is chased by bystanders before tripping, falling to the ground and shooting another man.

“I’ve had people saying, ‘Why don’t you deputize citizens?’” Sheriff Beth said. “This is why you don’t deputize citizens with guns to protect Kenosha.”

The protests of the shooting of Mr. Blake have reverberated far beyond Kenosha: Demonstrators in other cities have chanted his name, and protests in cities like Madison, Wis., have intensified since the police shooting.

In Florida, the N.B.A. postponement was an extraordinary escalation of how players have demonstrated for social causes this season, with numerous athletes speaking out against systemic racism and police brutality.

The boycott was quickly followed by the postponement of two more N.B.A. playoff games scheduled for Wednesday night, and other leagues also took notice: W.N.B.A. players refused to play in their games and two Major League Baseball games were called off because athletes chose not to participate.

“WE DEMAND CHANGE,” the Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James wrote on Twitter. “SICK OF IT.”

The postponement also affected first-round games between the Lakers and the Portland Trail Blazers, and between the Oklahoma City Thunder and the Houston Rockets.

Players from the Boston Celtics and the Toronto Raptors said on Wednesday that they were considering boycotting the first game of their series on Thursday night, and that some had raised the possibility of leaving the N.B.A.’s restricted site at Walt Disney World near Orlando, Fla., where the league is playing out its season in quarantine because of the coronavirus pandemic.