

Police formally apologise over Dalian Atkinson death after officer's conviction

Police chief writes to ex-footballer's family praising their strength and dignity in the years since his death



The former Aston Villa forward Dalian Atkinson retired from football in 2001 and died in 2016.

Vikram Dodd *Police and crime correspondent*

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Police have formally apologised to the family of the former footballer Dalian Atkinson after an officer who kicked and fired an electric stun gun at him was convicted over his death, the Guardian has learned.

In June PC Benjamin Monk, of the West Mercia force, became the first officer in more than three decades to be convicted of manslaughter during the course of his duties.

The jury heard that he fired a stun gun into Atkinson for 33 seconds – six times longer than is standard – and then kicked him twice in the head, leaving a boot imprint on his forehead and blood on the officer's laces.

Police had been called in August 2016 to an early morning disturbance as Atkinson had a mental health crisis in the street outside his father's house in Telford, Shropshire.

Some, including the Atkinson family, see the case as a British version of the US police killing of George Floyd. The family say the apology after five years was overdue.

A new chief constable, Pippa Mills, took over the West Mercia force in September. In her letter of apology, Mills wrote: “A police uniform does not grant officers immunity to behave unlawfully or to abuse their powers. Ben Monk’s conduct was in direct contradiction to the standards and behaviour of the policing service, and understandably undermined public confidence.”

The letter accepts that Monk used unreasonable force, with the kicks to Atkinson’s head contributing to his death. It also accepts that Atkinson’s right to life, protected under the European convention on human rights, was breached.

Mills acknowledged that the death was “devastating” for the family, and added: “I cannot imagine the immense pain you have felt and how the significant delays with the trial have also added to your burden of grief. You have demonstrated great strength and dignity throughout the past five years.”

The letter followed negotiations between the family’s lawyers and police solicitors, with one area of contention being compensation after the guilty verdict.

The chief constable pledged to learn lessons from the death, and ended by saying: “I am deeply sorry for the devastating impact the actions of a West Mercia officer has caused you and I extend my deepest condolences.”

The letter makes no mention of whether Monk should have been an officer at the time. During his sentencing, it emerged that Monk had been found guilty by a police discipline tribunal of gross misconduct in 2010, but had been allowed to stay in the force.

After his manslaughter conviction and eight-year jail sentence, Monk, 43, was dismissed from the force.

Kate Maynard, the solicitor for Atkinson’s family, said: “Over five years after Dalian Atkinson died of horrific injuries caused by a serving police officer, this official apology to the family is welcomed and overdue.

“The chief constable’s acknowledgment that a police uniform does not grant immunity is especially pertinent in a year that has seen other terrible examples of deadly police violence. It is hoped that this will serve as a deterrent, and also embolden those who seek police accountability.”

West Mercia police declined to comment.