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Video shows N.J. police fatally shooting man armed with knife last month

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For about 45 minutes, Asbury Park police and local authorities negotiated with a 39-year-old man, asking him to drop the knife he was holding and come out of a room where he had barricaded himself.

Then the man cracked the bedroom door, steak knife in hand.

“I’m gonna stab him,” Hasani Best says to Asbury Park police Sgt. Sean DeShader, according to body camera footage of the incident released by the state Attorney General’s office Tuesday.

One second later, according to DeShader’s body camera, the veteran cop fired multiple shots at Best.

The video does not show Best advancing toward the officers just before the shots are fired.

And only moments earlier, the situation seemed to be defusing as the officers and Best were joking about cutting DeShader’s hair.

Best was pronounced dead at the Jersey Shore University Medical Center shortly thereafter.

The newly released video of the August shooting was made public by the Attorney General’s office Tuesday as part of its directive to make records related to deadly use-of-force incidents public once the initial phase of an investigation is complete.

Last week, Best’s family, who said they had been left in the dark about what happened to the Bronx native, called on the Attorney General’s office to release the body camera footage of Best’s deadly encounter with police.

The Attorney General’s office has not made a finding into the officer’s actions and said the investigation remains ongoing.

The family reviewed the footage Tuesday, according to the Attorney General’s office

Carol Sanders of the Bronx, who raised Hasani Best, was his legal guardian and considered him her son, began to cry when asked about the video Tuesday night.

“Unjustified, that’s all I can say is unjustified,” Sanders said. “Right now, my head is hurting and I’m upset about my son.”

She said she would be back in New Jersey on Wednesday, for an afternoon press conference at City Hall in Asbury Park.

Authorities also released the 911 call that prompted police to go to the two-family residence in the 900 block of 4th Avenue in Asbury Park on Aug. 21.

“My neighbors are fighting,” a woman quietly tells the dispatcher.

The fight was between a man and a woman and it sounded physical, the caller said, and the couple was known for fighting physically.

“She’s still screaming out for me, but, to help her, but I can’t,” the caller said, referring to the woman with Best. “Can you send someone?”

Asbury Park police and Monmouth County sheriff’s officers arrived shortly after 9 p.m., authorities said. The woman who Best had gotten in a dispute with was outside, while Best, who was Black, was inside.

At 9:24 p.m. DeShader, a Black officer, enters the second-floor apartment along with other officers and soon encounters Best, who barricades himself in a room in the apartment armed with a knife. Within minutes, the officers attempt to use a Taser on Best, but it is unsuccessful, according to the video.

Over the next 45 minutes, DeShader and the other officers continually plead with Best to drop the knife and come out of the room with his hands up, trying convince him that the charges will be minimal and that his son needs him, according to the video.

“Come on, Mr. Best,” DeShader said. “We’ve dealt with you too many times. Just put the knife down.”

Best can be heard on the video repeatedly refusing pleas by police to drop the knife. He told the cops that he was “tired” and they should “just do what you gotta do, please.” He even told the officers they would be justified in using deadly force because he had a weapon and the Taser was unsuccessful, according to the video.

He also rails against the woman he was arguing with and at least twice says that he might murder her.

“I’m tired. Tired. And again, you’re justified. ‘He had a weapon, came at y’all.’ Did the bulls--t with the f---ing taser,” Best told the officers through the door. “Be a f---ing man. Knock the door down and do what you gotta do.”

But the officers did not knock down the door, and instead they continued to negotiate unsuccessfully with Best.

With 10:08 p.m. showing on the video counter, Best cracks the door and is holding the knife. He asks the officer to give him his phone, but he still refuses to put the knife down.

Only moments before shooting, the highly tense mood inside the apartment seemed to lighten briefly, when Best and DeShader joked about cutting his hair.

But then Best opens the door again and refuses to put down the knife, according to the video. He quickly moves toward the officers, but remains in the room with door less than halfway open.

“Don’t do that,” DeShader says.

“I’m gonna stab him” Best replies.

DeShader then fires at least two shots at Best and the officers rush into the room, declaring that Best is down and is no longer in possession of the knife.

“S--t,” DeShader can be heard saying shortly after firing the shots.

The officers, according to the video, drag the 39-year-old out of the room into the hallway of the apartment and stand around him.

Right before the video released by the Attorney General’s office ends, a paramedic arrives and begins attending to Best less than a minute after he was shot.

The Asbury Park Police Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the incident. DeShader, who has been an Asbury Park cop since 2003, could not be reached for comment. His current job status is unclear.

Dennis Kenney, a former police officer and criminal justice professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York who reviewed the footage, said he was surprised when the shots were fired.

“The initial shot was so unexpected that I wondered at first if it had been an accidental discharge,” he said in an email Tuesday night.

“The police did well for the first while,” but said, but “if the subject was alone in the room ... it is likely a bad shoot.”

A spokesman for the attorney general’s office declined to say whether anyone was in the room with Best, or to offer more information.

Maria Haberfeld, a police science professor at John Jay who reviewed part of the footage, said Best “appears to be not all together mentally” with a “violent demeanor,” but noted that he was “not necessarily charging” the officers.

The footage was also reviewed Tuesday by Richard Rivera, an expert in police misconduct who was asked to review the shooting by Help Not Handcuffs, an Asbury Park-based police reform group that has been in touch with Best's family.

"The police overreacted to a man in crises," Rivera said in an email. "A man is dead and the officers' lives will never be the same. This is a sad, but all too often common outcome which was completely preventable. They rushed in without the need and until we have a complete and transparent community process of reviewing these incidents, more lives will be lost and ruined, unfortunately."