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Chasing a killer

An exclusive look at Baltimore's homicide unit as it investigates one of the more than 300 murders of 2015

By Justin Fenton

First in a five-part series taking a look inside a Baltimore police homicide investigation.

Police officers escort the skinny young man into the brightly lit interview room. Detective Thomas Jackson, a member of the Baltimore police homicide unit, takes a seat next to him.

It's been two days since the killing of Kevin Cannady. The 29-year-old was gunned down in the middle of the afternoon on a busy street corner in Northwest Baltimore. He was the youngest and last of three brothers lost to the city's violence.

Police believe at least a dozen people saw the shooting, but so far no one has come forward with the information they need to solve the case.

Jackson, 41, grew up with Cannady's oldest brother. He knows his mother. He is investigating a killing in his old neighborhood.

He believes the young man in the witness box saw the shooting. Now he's pleading with him.

"You can't kill your way out of the 'hood," Jackson says, his voice rising. "It's not gonna happen!"

Jackson has investigated hundreds of shootings in his 17-year career, but he's never seen anything like 2015. Cannady's death in September was the city's 242nd homicide of the year -- and there would be scores more to come.

When killings surged after the riots of April, officials and observers called it a spike. But the violence didn't settle back down. By year's end, the body count would set records.

Jackson turns to his young subject.

"So when you think it's gonna stop?" he asks.

"It's never gonna stop," the young man says.

"It has to," Jackson says.

No witnesses

Jackson and fellow detective Damon Talley, veterans of the 50-member homicide unit, picked up Cannady's killing on Sept. 21.



Justin Fenton/Baltimore Sun

When the partners arrived at the crime scene in the 4800 block of Cordelia Ave. in the Langston Hughes neighborhood of Northwest Baltimore, Cannady's body was gone.

So, too, was anyone who might have witnessed his broad-daylight execution. As a light rain fell, the only people who approached the crime scene tape were pedestrians trying to pass through. They seemed irritated at the inconvenience.

A thick pool of blood lay on the sidewalk. A sign nearby welcomed visitors to the onetime "clean block winner." Just around the corner was Fear Avenue.

The first officers to arrive at the scene greeted the detectives and relayed what information they had been able to gather.

When Jackson heard the victim's name, he winced and tilted his head back. He recognized the name as the younger brother of his old friend, Anthony Cannady.

Now all of Diane Frederick's sons were dead. And it fell to Jackson to deliver her justice for the last killing.

Blistering pace

The uptick in violence began with the death of Freddie Gray. The 25-year-old Baltimore man died in April after suffering a severe spinal cord injury in police custody.

There followed the protests against police brutality. And on the day Gray was buried, the riots.

Then the killings. Forty homicides in May, the city's deadliest month in more than four decades. Twenty-nine more in June. Then 45 in July -- a record.

The city has averaged more than a killing a day since Gray's death.

On Nov. 14, Baltimore suffered its 300th homicide of 2015. It was the first time since 1999 that the city had reached that grim milestone.

Through Saturday, the death toll stood at 338.

The sheer volume has left overworked homicide detectives in a constant state of triage.

The Police Department granted The Baltimore Sun exclusive access to the homicide unit as it investigated the Cannady case. A Sun reporter accompanied detectives on the street, watched them pore over leads and interview suspects, and followed them as they picked up additional cases.

The work of the homicide unit was grueling and unforgiving even before the uptick in violence. The

blistering pace of 2015 has jolted the detectives' sense of reality. They're working harder but getting less accomplished.

Jackson, a married father of five, has also been stretching the patience of his family, who know that Dad may have to run out at any time. He regrets missing important events like his son's prom in the spring, but any work that could take a killer off the streets comes first.

"It's a lot more hustle and bustle right now, but this is what we signed up to do," Jackson said. "A lot of times I ask myself, 'Well, what's gonna be the turnaround point?' ... Honestly, I don't know."

Low closure

Talley, 40, worked in drug units and served warrants before he joined homicide four years ago. Broad-shouldered and quiet, he favors Gucci eyeglasses and bow ties.

He is the primary detective, and headed to an alley shortly after arriving at the scene. An anonymous tipster had dialed 911 to tell police where the gunman had ditched the weapon.

Sgt. Sean Jones, the detectives' supervisor, counted it a small victory.

"That tells me we have at least one citizen that gives a s-- --."

A couple of decades ago -- the last time the city saw so much killing -- Baltimore's homicide unit closed more than 70 percent of its cases. Veterans talk of returning to the office from a crime scene to find a fistful of tips waiting for them.

But the widening gulf between police and the community since then has made witness cooperation a rarity.

Forensic science has advanced, and surveillance cameras have grown common in the city. But detectives say witnesses remain the most important element in successfully bringing charges against a suspect.

The challenges are not exclusive to Baltimore, but are being felt here more acutely. Among similar-sized cities in 2014, the average for cases closed -- through arrest or other means, such as the death of the suspect -- was 56 percent.

In Baltimore, it was 45 percent. This year, it has fallen to 31 percent.

The closure rate is so low that detectives grouse that the year shouldn't even be counted. One likened it to baseball's steroid era, when players used performance-enhancing drugs to rewrite the record book. They say this year's homicide numbers should be marked with an asterisk: The Freddie Gray era.

Detectives say they have suspects in as many as three-quarters of cases, but in many instances they lack the evidence to move forward or can't convince prosecutors, who in recent years have wielded more authority over detectives' ability to charge. Police once made the call, but ceded that power to prosecutors who were frustrated with cases that they felt weren't ready to go to court.

At the scene

In the search for witnesses, the homicide unit has tried to get creative. Talley and Jackson drove to the scene of Cannady's killing in a new Crimestoppers SUV, a Chevy Tahoe slathered in decals and the phone number for a tip line. Cops call it the Downtown Locker Room truck.

Talley trudged through a trash-strewn alley, where officers were looking for the murder weapon.

Foxtrot, a police helicopter, was deafening overhead, swirling low with heat-detecting technology to search for the weapon.

"It should still be hot," Talley told an officer. "We've got at least 28 minutes until it cools down."

Talley walked to a corner store that had two cameras trained on the area. Many small businesses use dummy cameras as high-tech scarecrows, but these were rolling when the shooting occurred.

He squeezed behind the bulletproof glass door, wedging himself between shelves of deodorant and a display holding boxes of beef jerky.

He was joined by Detective Joe Brown, who has spent his career in the Northwest District. Brown had been at the intersection moments before the killing, investigating a shooting from days earlier. After 15 years in the district, Brown knows the players in this area well. Before Cannady was killed, he saw two men he knew from previous investigations.

Brown and Talley looked at a computer screen, scanning the footage for confirmation. One of the men was particularly familiar to Brown.

"We've looked at him for at least three, four shootings," he said. "They call him the Golden Child."

Talley asked why.

"He gets off," Brown said. "He beats every f-- -- case."

Cameras from another business captured the shooting itself. The detectives headed over. An employee had the footage queued up.

"This is where everything is going to start," the employee said.

"Put it to two screens," Jackson barked. He realized he was curt. "Please. Pardon me. Thank you."

The shooting is nearly out of view, and details are difficult to make out, but the actions are clear.

A black vehicle can be seen pulling onto Cordelia and then stopping. Cannady gets out of the passenger side, greets someone with a fist bump and they walk together toward the corner.

A second man had been with the first man, but now lingers behind as he follows the pair.

There are people milling about and cars passing, but the gunman is undeterred. He accelerates his stride, walks up behind Cannady, raises a gun to the back of his head and fires a single shot.

Cannady falls forward to the ground and lies still.

Cannady's companion and his killer run away together. The car that brought Cannady to the corner speeds off.

"Everybody out there, just standing there as he's laying on the ground," Talley said softly to no one in particular as he watched the footage. "Everybody just so casual."

Police have a strong lead: The Golden Child was one of the men with Cannady right before he was shot.

Patrol officers, meanwhile, uncovered the gun in the alley -- a six-shooter revolver manufactured in the 1940s, loaded except for the one spent round, and concealed by brush.

The weapon could hold the shooter's DNA. The detectives sent it to the crime lab for analysis.

With the gun, the videos and Brown's knowledge of who was depicted on the tape, the detectives seemed poised to solve the case that night.

At least, that's how it works on television. In the real world, the detectives' process is to keep probing. They want to have their information shored up before they confront a suspect.

Parts of the process -- such as DNA analysis -- will take weeks. And with the volume of cases coming into the unit, there's no guarantee Talley and Jackson won't be assigned a new one that would distract them from finding the person who killed Kevin Cannady.

But they don't think about that now. Instead, they prepare to pull all-nighters for as long as it takes, using the video as a starting point as they begin the methodical process of building their case.

Three brothers

Jackson didn't plan to become a police officer. He just needed a job. He attended Carver Vocational Technical High School in Coppin Heights and hoped to become a craftsman or work on cars. But after he graduated in 1993, he found himself working dead-end maintenance jobs.

He decided it was time for a change. He applied for jobs with the Police Department, the post office, the Maryland Transit Administration, the corrections system, the Fire Department. The Police Department responded first.

Jackson had a clean record. As a teen, he had played sports and simply "wasn't interested in the happenings of my surroundings."

One of his friends growing up was Anthony Cannady, Kevin's older brother. They went skating at the old Painters Mill on Saturdays and attended under-21 nights at clubs. But they eventually drifted apart.

Jackson became a police officer in 1998. He was 23.

Anthony Cannady had taken a different path, and that same year his problems were coming to a head.

Police believed Cannady was helping supply drug dealers in his Northwest Baltimore neighborhood. He was arrested during a raid on an apartment. Police reported finding three guns and \$20,000 worth of crack cocaine.



Justin Fenton/Baltimore Sun

Four months later, police found the 24-year-old and two other people, a couple who let drug dealers use their home as a safe house, dead in the couple's basement from shotgun blasts. Their limbs had been bound with duct tape.

Investigators suspected a notorious enforcer for an area drug crew but were unable to prove a link. The triple killing went unsolved.

A decade later, a second Cannady brother was killed -- this time by police. Officers were patrolling Park Heights in March 2009 when they saw Shawn Cannady and another person sitting in a Lexus in an alley.

The officers suspected drug activity. They got out of their car with badges hanging from their necks, they said, and approached.

Shawn Cannady began to drive the car in their direction, they said. One fired a single shot, and the car crashed into a home. Cannady, 30, died two days later.

The officer who fired the shot was cleared of criminal wrongdoing, but the family collected a \$100,000 settlement from the city.

Both Anthony and Shawn Cannady had been involved in drug dealing. Their younger brother would follow them into the business.

"It was something almost handed down to him," their uncle, Robert Frederick, told The Sun.

The Cannadys' father struggled with drugs, Frederick said, and "stepped out of the picture" when Kevin was young. Rudolph Cannady died of a drug overdose in 2003.

The Cannadys' mother, Diane Frederick, who works in the school system as a teacher's aide, fought to raise them right, her brother said. But she was unable to push away the outside influences that drew them



Karl Merton Ferron/Baltimore Sun

toward the drug trade.

Robert Frederick recalled Shawn Cannady pulling up to the family home in nice cars, and rolling his sleeve to flaunt drug money wrapped around his forearm with rubber bands.

Frederick, a former Marine who worked 30 years for the U.S. Postal Service, and other relatives earned an honest living. They made decent pay and drove regular cars. Frederick once called in a favor and asked a friend to hire Kevin at a local Burger King. But he showed no interest in the job and quit after two weeks.

Frederick recalled fights in the family home over Kevin's direction. Kevin would curse him and tell him to stay out of his business.

"This is what he felt like he was meant to do," Frederick said.

The breaking point came a few years ago when Robert Frederick learned Kevin was selling drugs out of the family home. Frederick had bought the home for his mother and his sister -- Kevin's mother -- and told Kevin he wouldn't stand for those kind of activities.

Kevin moved out, and he and Frederick spoke little after that.

Frederick hurts for his sister's loss, but said there was a feeling of inevitability that Kevin would die on the streets.

"I'd been telling him for years, 'If you don't get out of the game, you're gonna see what's gonna happen,'" Frederick said.

Police had promised to solve Anthony Cannady's death, Frederick said, but the family felt they were left hanging with little communication.

Shawn's death at the hands of an officer turned that frustration with law enforcement to anger.

Now a detective they could trust -- Jackson -- was tasked with trying to bring justice for the third brother.

Diane Frederick declined to speak to The Sun for this article. Her brother says she's counting on Jackson.

"She's placing a lot of faith in him," Robert Frederick said.

The notification

When Jackson recognized the name of the victim at the homicide scene that night, he kept it to himself. He had been randomly assigned to the case, and wanted to keep emotion and his personal history out of

it.

Still, deep down it burned him that Cannady's mother had lost the last of her three sons.

About 9:30 p.m., four hours after arriving at the crime scene, Jackson and Talley drove to the Cannady home on West Garrison Avenue. They call it a "notification" meeting, because sometimes they are in the position of telling a family of a loved one's death.

The detectives say it's imperative to make and maintain a connection with a victim's family, because they might hear information from the street that would never otherwise reach police. But sometimes relatives tell investigators they want nothing to do with the case.

Cannady's family had received the bad news already at Sinai Hospital, where Kevin was pronounced dead. The street outside the home was dark, and several people had assembled in clusters on the sidewalk and up to the front porch.

Some greeted the detectives with a subdued "What's up?"

Diane Frederick sat in the orange-painted living room of the tidy home, under a large clock made from a class picture of Shawn. About 15 relatives and friends were pressed into corners. Above the television was a picture of "The Last Supper." The room was hushed as the detectives pushed through.

Jackson greeted a few people as he made his way toward Cannady's mother. Despite his ties to the family, he deferred to Talley.

"How y'all doing," Talley said quietly.

Talley asked if anyone knew what Cannady might have been doing in the area of Reisterstown Road and Cordelia Avenue. It's not far from the family home, but considered by people from his neighborhood to be unfriendly territory.

Frederick said Kevin had been keeping to himself recently, but she was not aware of any problems he was having with anyone.

The detectives asked if he had a girlfriend, and who his closest friends were.

Jackson addressed her, but spoke so everyone could hear.

"Something happened, but we don't know what," he said. "We're gonna need as much help as we can possibly get."

After a conversation that lasted no more than 10 minutes and yielded little, the detectives turned to leave.

"Sorry about your loved one," Talley said. "We're going to try our best to find out who killed him."

Talley walked out, but Jackson hung behind. He told the family they could trust Talley -- and reiterated that they would need their help.

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About the series

The Baltimore Police Department granted The Baltimore Sun exclusive access to the homicide unit as it investigated the killing of Kevin Cannady, a 29-year-old who was fatally shot Sept. 21. A Sun reporter accompanied detectives on the street, watched them pore over leads and interview suspects, and followed them as they picked up additional cases.

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A crucial witness, a code of silence

Victim 'wouldn't want me to say a ... thing,' detectives are told

By Justin Fenton

Third in a five-part series taking a look inside a Baltimore police homicide investigation.

Two days after Kevin Cannady was gunned down in Baltimore, Detectives Thomas Jackson and Damon Talley shifted their focus to finding a witness whose name they overheard on a jailhouse call about Cannady's death.

They had interviewed the woman who discussed the killing in the call to the inmate. She confirmed a possible motive -- she said Cannady "was dealing with someone he shouldn't have been dealing with" -- and the name of a man who was at the scene of the killing.

That man would be a key witness. Now the officers had to find him.

They called his girlfriend. They visited the home of his grandmother, near Pimlico Race Course.

They were trying to apply pressure to his network. Young men living a street life move from place to place. But they can be counted on to check in with the women in their lives.

Cannady, 29, was killed Sept. 21 in Northwest Baltimore, the city's 242nd homicide in a record-breaking year. The city Police Department granted The Baltimore Sun exclusive access to the homicide unit as detectives investigated his death.

The grandmother demanded to know what the detectives wanted with the man.

"I'm 83 years old," she said. "I need to know what it is, so I can stop it."

Jackson refused to say.

"I need him," he said. "Hopefully, before the sun goes down."

The pressure worked: The witness eventually called Jackson. He said he would stop by the unit by 7 p.m.

When 8:30 came, and still no sign of the man, Jackson sat down by a big-screen TV in the corner of the office and called his family.

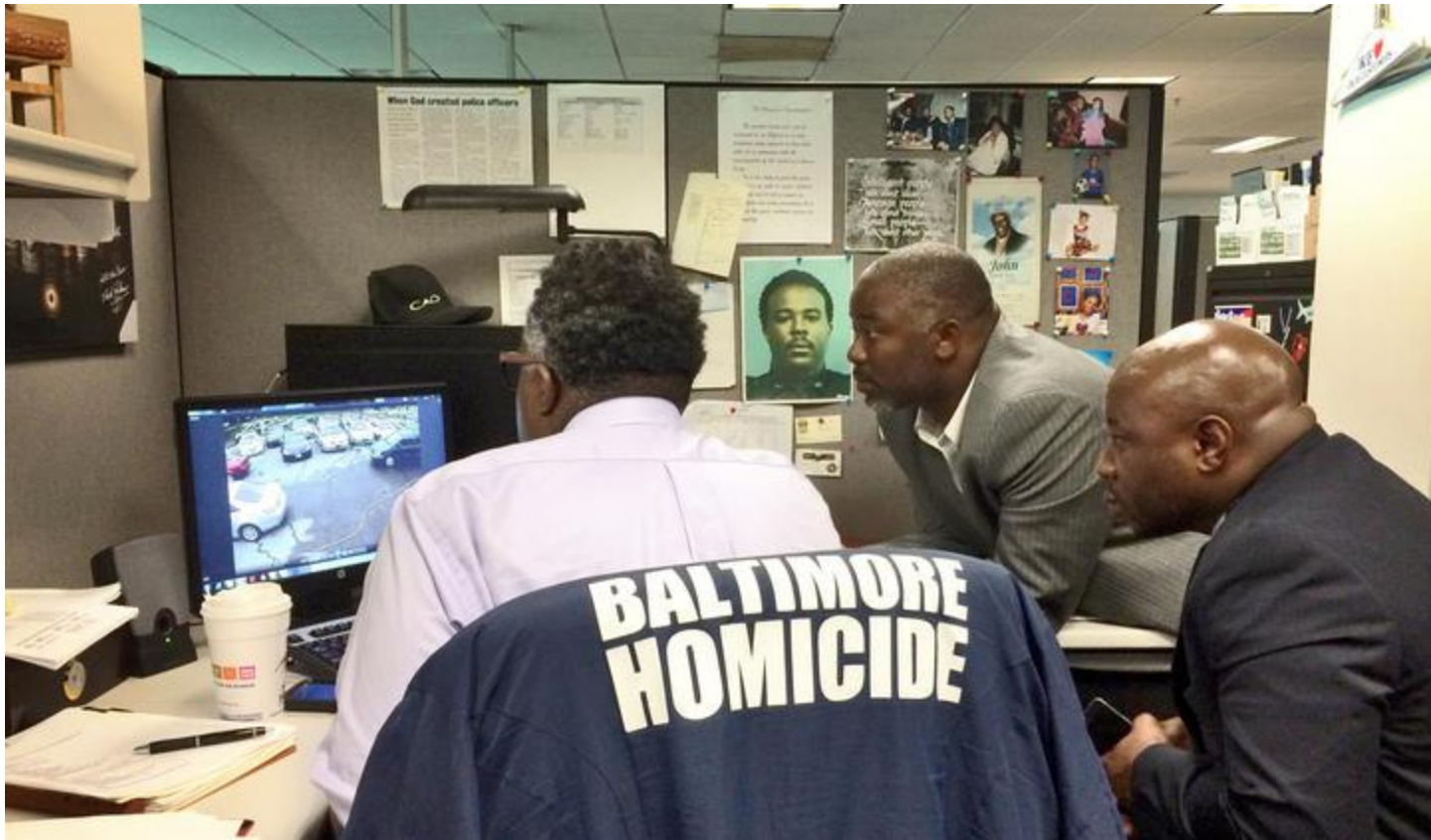
Talley strolled over to watch "Empire," about a former drug dealer turned hip-hop mogul.

"I told you he wasn't coming," Talley said.

Jackson would not give up on the witness. He dialed his number.

"I want him tonight," Jackson said.

"We can't force him," Talley said.



Justin Fenton/Baltimore Sun

"I'm not forcing," Jackson said. "I'm persuading him."

He wanted to call the man's grandmother again, as well as his girlfriend.

"If we worry them enough, he'll come," he said. "They'll get to the point of, 'This guy keeps calling.'"

The phone rang. It was the man. He said he was on his way.

Talley eased back in a chair.

"Might come. Might not."

At 10:30 p.m., the phone rang. Another detective answered.

"It's him. He's at the booth."

Jackson was vindicated.

"Winner winner, chicken dinner!"

'That's how it is'

For Baltimore homicide detectives building a case -- and, more important, for the prosecutors who decide whether to file charges against a suspect -- witnesses remain the most important piece of the puzzle. But few want to cooperate, out of fear or distrust or dislike of police. Many times, it's all three.

The man came willingly, though perhaps with some prodding by his loved ones. Once the questioning began, the detectives did not have to twist his arm for him to admit he was there when Cannady was killed.

He relayed what he saw, but told the detectives his view was limited. He wasn't looking when the shooting occurred, he said, and he took off after hearing the gunshot.

Jackson sat against the wall as Talley led the interview.

Then he picked up his chair and pulled it up alongside the witness.

Jackson wanted to press him on one detail: The witness said Cannady had initially been standing on Reisterstown Road. This was incorrect.

"The reason I say that is, I know," Jackson said. "We have video."

"I need you to be as honest as you can," he continued. "[Cannady] needs you. For real. His mom, she

needs you. His sister, she needs you. ... You're not helping the police. You're helping [the family]."

"If I tell y'all what y'all want to hear, I'll get killed," the man responded. "Even if I knew who did it, I couldn't say anything."

Why? Jackson inquired.

"Because that's how it is," the witness said.

A reality of Baltimore's gun violence is that shootings portend more shootings. The cycle of retaliation can go on for years. Jackson was concerned that someone from Cannady's circle might try to take matters into his own hands.

"All y'all gonna do is exterminate each other and hurt each other's families," Jackson said. "The last thing I want is you engaged in a war. Just cuz y'all want to show which is the tougher side."

Jackson asked the man when the city's violence was going to stop. The man responded "never."

Jackson asked the man if he'd been shot before. He said yes.

"It's been going on since the beginning of time," the witness said.

"No," Jackson said. "No, no, no."

Jackson asked what the witness thought Kevin would want him to do.

"I know Kevin's looking down from heaven, and he wouldn't want me to tell. He wouldn't want me to say a m--f-- thing."

"What about his mother?" Jackson asked.

"She know. She lost three sons."

"You are the best chance we have," Jackson said.

"Let's say I tell you who these guys are," the witness said. "What if I end up in the same prison?"

"Don't ever take your ass back to prison!" Jackson blurted out. "You don't need the streets. You know that! You do what you supposed to do. You get a job. You work. You find a living for yourself. Then you ain't gonna have no time to spend no time on the corner. ..."

"This can be the point that you change your life forever. You can do this."

The witness asked if he could leave. The detectives let him go.

He left them with this: "If I was to tell you anything, it would be a lie. It would be a thought of who I think did it. Because I didn't see anything. It would be a complete lie, because I honestly didn't see it. It would be wrong."

There might have been a measure of truth in that. If he wasn't sure, how could he send police down that path? Or was it cover to not pass along what he had heard?

The detectives felt the witness was on the cusp of helping, but ultimately they weren't any closer.

'We got him'

Detectives had leads on witnesses, but they didn't know who pulled the trigger. Then on Sept. 24, three days after the killing, a tipster provided a nickname for the shooter. Detective Joe Brown, a veteran of the Northwest District, matched the nickname to a suspect. He rattled off what he knew of the man.

Among the details: He was 21, Brown said. He was a known associate of the "Golden Child" -- a gang member, suspected in several shootings, with a penchant for wriggling out of trouble.

After scouring footage taken inside a nearby convenience store shortly before the killing, detectives believed they had identified the shooter.

He could be seen walking with the Golden Child, who greeted Cannady, and then falling behind the pair before pulling the trigger. The shooter and the Golden Child run away in the same direction.

"We got him, Jack," Talley announced.

Talley dialed the alleged shooter's probation agent. He asked about his addresses and whether he had been checking in.

He had not. That meant he could be arrested on a warrant for violating his probation -- and then brought in for questioning.

The detectives directed officers on the street to look for the man.

This was all passed on to the prosecutor assigned to the case. But the detectives knew they didn't have enough evidence to bring charges. Getting suspects and witnesses to confirm that they were at the scene



Justin Fenton/Baltimore Sun

can ensure they have enough.

And that meant finding the Golden Child.

The Golden Child was only 23, but he already had a long list of arrests -- and a longer list of cases in which he was suspected.

If he wasn't involved in killing Cannady, the detectives were sure he would at least know something about it.

Getting someone with his record -- and his success at avoiding serious punishment -- to offer something meaningful seemed an impossible task. But they needed to try.

The job of finding him was assigned to a specialized operations unit that works the streets. But after a week had passed with still no sign of him, Jackson decided that he and Talley needed to take matters into their own hands.

"We don't have the luxury to wait around," Jackson told his partner. They headed out.

At the first house the detectives visited in the Coppin Heights area, a man sitting on the front porch told them that the Golden Child stays there, and had done so the previous night.

"How do you get in touch with him in an emergency?" they asked the man.

"Don't be no emergency," he responded.

Talley was writing his phone number on the back of a business card when a boy of about 10 came to the front door.

"Don't be telling our business!" the boy shouted at the man.

In the car, the detectives marveled at the young boy. "He's conditioned already: Don't talk to the police," Talley says.

Back at the homicide unit, Talley's phone rang. It was the Golden Child. He told Talley he would come by around 5 p.m. or 6.

The five o'clock hour passed, and the Golden Child had not come.

"He ain't coming in unless it's in handcuffs," said Sgt. Sean Jones, the detectives' supervisor.

Jones was right. The Golden Child didn't show. But three days later, when two police officers spotted him in front of a vacant home in Park Heights, they picked him up and brought him in.

Several other investigators wanted a crack at asking him about cases they were working on.

But Talley and Jackson would have their chance first.

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About the series

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A final attempt to nail down the case

Investigators push hard to produce evidence for a charge

in the September killing of Kevin Cannady

By Justin Fenton

Last in a five-part series taking a look inside a Baltimore police homicide investigation.

A month had passed since the killing of Kevin Cannady, but the case remained high on the list of Detectives Thomas Jackson and Damon Talley.

Within hours of his death, the detectives had the murder weapon -- a 1940s-era revolver -- and video of the crime that they used to identify people they believed were involved. Weeks later, they were still trying to track down the man they believed executed Cannady in broad daylight, and had appealed to the top levels of the Baltimore Police Department to put units on the lookout.

The gunman appeared to have gone underground. He had not reported to his probation agent.

That meant that if he were found, he could be taken into custody for violating probation. Then police could take a DNA sample to compare with the genetic material found on the gun recovered at the scene.

In the meantime, they wanted to reinterview the witness they called the "Golden Child." Police had given him the nickname for his ability to get out of trouble. They were certain he knew more about Cannady's death than he had let on.

Cannady, 29, was shot to death Sept. 21 in the 4800 block of Cordelia Ave. in Northwest Baltimore.

He was the city's 242nd homicide in 2015, and the third of three brothers lost to violence. The Baltimore Police Department gave The Baltimore Sun exclusive access as the detectives investigated his death.

Confronting 'Golden Child'

On Halloween night, Jackson was having dinner with his family. Talley was in Washington helping a friend move.

Word came around 8 p.m. that the Golden Child had been caught with a handgun in Northwest Baltimore. He was being held at the homicide unit so he could be interviewed again.

Within a few hours, Jackson and Talley were back at work, debating how to approach him this time.

The Golden Child kept his head buried in his folded arms for the duration of the interview. He was more combative than in his first visit, and contradicted some of the things he said then.

The detectives showed him six mug shots, including a picture of the man they believed was the shooter. But he flipped past it, just as he did the other five.

Jackson sighed and twirled a pair of handcuffs.

He had an idea. It was unorthodox.

If they showed the Golden Child the surveillance camera footage of the shooting, the detective thought, he would realize how preposterous his denying that he was there sounded. Jackson couldn't see a reason not to try.

It was after midnight. The Golden Child -- his legs shackled, his hoodie over his head -- was led across the floor to Talley's desk.

Jackson had scrubbed the work space, taking down pictures of Talley's children and putting the pushpins in a drawer. He cued up several snippets of footage taken outside a corner store near the shooting to show different angles and key moments.

Jackson, his arm draped across the back of the Golden Child's chair, showed him the video.

"Who's that?" the detective asked.

The Golden Child acknowledged it was him.

Jackson then pointed out the shooter. He walked the Golden Child through various angles that show the pair crossing paths, exchanging words and walking together before the shooting.

Then he pulled up the tape of the shooting. The Golden Child again acknowledged being there, and the detective let the footage run.

"You know what that looks like?" Jackson asked.

"Togetherness," Talley said.

Jackson's eyes searched the Golden Child's face. You can do this, he urged him.

Talley smirked. In his view, the interview was going nowhere.

In the end, the Golden Child fully recanted.

Jackson leaned back in his chair and cracked his knuckles. The interview was done.

But not all was lost, the detectives' supervisor told them afterward. With the Golden Child's record, he would be ordered held without bond, facing serious time for being caught with the gun. Police might be able to persuade federal prosecutors to take the case, bringing the prospect of decades in prison -- and more pressure they could use to elicit answers in Cannady's killing.

Still, Jackson wondered, why couldn't he persuade the witness to spill the details? What angle did he fail to play?

It was now 2 a.m., and the detectives were scheduled to work at 6. There wasn't any point to going home.

'That guy right there'

On the morning of Nov. 22, the Sunday before Thanksgiving and two months after Cannady's death, detectives got the call that the 21-year-old suspected gunman was finally in custody.

Talley had picked up a case, a homicide in the South Baltimore neighborhood of Brooklyn, his seventh of the year as a primary detective. It had good leads, and he had just finished a marathon shift from Friday morning to late Saturday night on it.

He was home when he was summoned back to police headquarters on Sunday to meet Cannady's alleged killer face to face.

Since their interview with the Golden Child, Jackson had grown a beard. Deliberately -- not the stubble that grows after marathon work schedules. With the city crossing the 300-homicide mark a week earlier and nine more people slain since then, the homicide unit had been run ragged. Jackson hadn't had time to think about the Cannady case.

Jackson resolved that they would show the suspect their key cards -- the still images and videos from the scene -- in hopes he'd at least confirm he was there. Though they were confident he was the man captured in the footage, his own acknowledgment would be important for a jury to hear.

The interview was over almost before it began: The suspect fretted about waiving his Miranda rights.

But then he asked for a cigarette, and the detectives proceeded.

The suspect began to describe the Golden Child, identifying a particularly distinguishing trait. But then



Justin Fenton/Baltimore Sun

he stopped short, saying he was fearful of retribution.

So began an eight-hour back-and-forth, in which the suspect would smoke eight cigarettes and play mental chess with five investigators.

The detectives' approach was this: We know you were there. What we want from you is the why -- you can't be so cold that you did it for no reason or without outside influence. What's the real story?

"Our purpose in this is to get your perspective, but also to find out what it is that caused something like this to happen," Jackson said. "It's not 'lock him up and send him to jail and be done with it.' "

Jackson genuinely wanted to know: Why do so many people in the city lose their lives? He grew up in a tough neighborhood, but it never made sense to him.

If they really thought he did it, the suspect asked, why hadn't he been charged?

With the help of other detectives, Jackson lugged a desktop computer into the interview room so when they showed the suspect the video, his reaction would be on tape and could one day be played for jurors. The suspect stood over the computer, propping his right leg up on the table and smoking one of the detectives' cigarettes.

It showed a man wearing shorts and a North Face jacket walking off screen, and a man with the jacket but wearing sweatpants re-entering the frame, walking up behind Cannady and firing.

The suspected gunman admitted to having been there but claimed he passed his clothes on to another man: 27-year-old Terrell "Rell" Jones.

Jones was killed three weeks after Cannady. Detectives believe the homicides might be related, but they believed they had the shooter in front of them. Judging by body type, the stride and the shoes, the man in shorts and the man in sweatpants appeared to be the same person.

"That guy right there," Jackson said, pointing to the video, "went out there and pulled that trigger. That guy right there, is this guy right here," he said, pointing to a still shot of the man in the convenience store video. "And that guy right there be you."

"I'm willing to go to trial, because I didn't do this s-- --," the suspected gunman said.

Then there were moments when he hinted that he wanted to say what happened, only to explain he couldn't.

At one point, with the detectives outside the room, he threw up on the floor.

Jackson was frustrated at first. But eventually he grew confident that they had what they needed to charge him, simply because he placed himself there. His other denials were to be expected.

"What is he supposed to say?" Jackson said to Talley. "He's supposed to say, 'I didn't do it.' You know how many murders we close without confessions? The game is over, baby."

The detectives' supervisor, Sgt. Sean Jones, reviewed the footage. "I'm convinced," Jones said. "It's a good case."

They took a mouth swab of the suspect's DNA and called the prosecutor assigned to the case. She wanted to wait for lab results and for the detectives to compile phone records and other evidence before deciding whether to charge.

Alone in a holding cell, the suspect asked if he could make a phone call. He was handed a burner

cellphone.

He was still under the watchful eyes and ears of the closed-circuit system, and the detectives listened from a desktop computer as the suspect paced the tiny room.

He called people, telling each that he had been taken into custody. He asked people to come see him and help him get money in his commissary account. He repeated some of the detectives' claims, and scoffed.

Decisions pending

Just before Christmas, a 4-year-old girl with braids walked down a sidewalk in the Cylburn neighborhood. Carrying two wrapped presents, she turned into a gated yard decorated with candy canes and holiday greetings. She walked up the steps to a front door covered with shiny paper, and a woman welcomed her inside.

The little girl placed the presents on the floor, near a Christmas tree with presents spilling out from underneath.

"Who's that?" asked Diane Frederick, Kevin Cannady's mother, pointing to a picture on the coffee table.

"Daddy," Kevin's daughter said.

It has been three months since the third of Frederick's sons was killed. The murder of her first son, Anthony, a childhood friend of Jackson's, in 1998 had gone unsolved. When police shot and killed another son in 2009, the family lost faith in police.

And Frederick continues to grieve with her daughter and grandchildren.

She had not heard from the detectives in Kevin's case for weeks. They have to balance keeping the family informed with keeping details out of the public eye.

But days earlier, they received positive news that they hope to soon share.

The Baltimore crime lab found "encouraging" results from an initial test on the DNA on the crime scene gun, but more testing needed to be done.

The detectives are sure that they have the right man and enough evidence to charge. A final decision would be made by prosecutors on whether to bring cases.

The two key figures in this case were behind bars on unrelated matters. The Sun isn't naming them because neither has been charged in Cannady's death.

Kevin Cannady's name is still in red on the board of cases on the homicide unit wall -- one of the 272 killings out of 344 this year in Baltimore that remain open. The investigation into Kevin Cannady's offered no new explanation for the surge in bloodshed.

For the detectives, however, the investigation represented a small victory. In September, Jackson and Talley arrived on scene to a spot of blood on the sidewalk and no witnesses, but developed what they believe is a solid case.

"There's a lot of cases where it's just a spot of blood, and you don't get much more than that," Jackson said.

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About the series

The Baltimore Police Department granted The Baltimore Sun exclusive access to the homicide unit as it investigated the killing of Kevin Cannady, a 29-year-old who was fatally shot Sept. 21. A Sun reporter accompanied detectives on the street, watched them pore over leads and interview suspects, and followed them as they picked up additional cases.