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A man named Shannon Brown called the McKinley County Sheriff's Office and said that two men were following and threatening him. Deputies met with Brown in Thoreau, but then several hours later found him unconscious near the intersection of Indio Road and State Highway 371. He was declared deceased at the scene.

One of the men who was reportedly threatening Brown was later identified as Rashawn Saunders, 26. Although the homicide took place Dec. 26, 2021, a bench warrant for Saunders' arrest wasn't filed until Feb. 2, over a year later. He was arrested Feb. 8.

The MCSO received a call around 1:15 am Dec. 26, 2021, and Deputies Harland Soseeah and Jeremy Shirley responded.

When they arrived at the scene at the Thoreau Speedway, Hwy. 371, mile marker 1, they met Brown. Brown told the deputies that two men had threatened him.

The harassment allegedly started at Red Mesa Express, 119 State Hwy. 371, where Brown had stopped to shave and use the restroom. Brown admitted he was banned from the convenience store. But while he was there, two men who had come up in a black car reportedly approached him and began arguing with him.

Brown said he decided to leave Red Mesa Express after the argument, and headed to the Speedway, which is less than a mile away. Shannon said that the two men followed him to Speedway and "started talking s*** to him."

Brown identified the car the men were driving as a black Chevy Impala with a Green Bay Packers license plate on the front bumper.

According to the affidavit, Soseeah offered to drive Brown to the detox center in Gallup for shelter, but Brown refused and walked away.

The deputies reportedly stayed in the area “in case the vehicle returned to Speedway.”

But then, around 1:30 am, the deputies allegedly heard gunshots. While they were searching Thoreau to try and find out where the shooting had come from, they found Brown near the intersection of Indio Road and State Highway 371.

According to the affidavit, Brown was deceased when the deputies found him, and he had two gunshot wounds in his back and one in his right elbow.

The case was originally assigned to Investigator Clayton Etsitty, who is no longer with the McKinley County Sheriff’s Office.

During his investigation, Etsitty interviewed two employees of Thoreau Speedway. The employees said that Brown was a homeless man who came to Speedway regularly to do laundry and shave.

The employees said that on Dec. 26, 2021, Brown got into an argument with two men, one of whom was identified as Saunders. One of the employees said that Saunders and the other man were employees of Red Mesa Express.

The employees backed up Brown’s story by saying he came into the Speedway after arguing with the two men. According to the affidavit, they also noted that he said he was being followed

by a black car and that he was afraid of being shot or stabbed.

While Brown was in the store, the two men came inside and bought some cigars. After he bought the cigars, Saunders reportedly confronted Brown and started arguing with him.

After the argument had gone on for a while, Saunders left and got back into his black Chevy. He then parked in front of the convenience store and began yelling and flipping Brown off.

During the daily switch shift at MCSO, deputies were made aware of the alleged murder and told to be on the lookout for a black Chevy Impala with a Green Bay Packers license plate on the front bumper.

Deputy Nocona Clark found the vehicle that matched both the convenience store employees' and Brown's description. Clark and Sgt. Garylle James met with Saunders, and he confirmed that he had been driving the vehicle the night before.

Saunders said he gave "an unidentified man" $20 while he was at the Thoreau Speedway. He said the two of them then got into an altercation, but afterward he and his companion left the area.

Etsitty left the MCSO before the case was finished and an arrest was made. Investigator Galvin Panteah took it over. He looked over all the interviews Etsity conducted, all the surveillance video from the night of the incident, and all the evidence, and concluded Saunders had committed the murder.

McKinley County Sheriff James Maiorano III said that it was Panteah's hard work that led to an arrest in the case.

"Galvin picked it up, went through all the information, looked through all the evidence that was presented, rewatched all the video, and he believed he had enough information based on that

case and the information he was able to find during his tenure with the case and so he filed a criminal complaint and an arrest warrant," Maiorano explained.

An arrest warrant for Saunders was signed by a judge on Feb. 2.

After MCSO deputies surveyed Thoreau for many days, Saunders was finally arrested on Feb. 8. He was charged with first-degree murder. His first court appearance was on Feb. 10, when the case moved to district court.

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