

In the Crown Court at Stafford

**Regina
v
Notman**

Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice May

24 November 2021

Jake Notman, you may stay seated for the present.

There will be orders for deprivation of the knife, forfeiture of cannabis and substances containing cannabis and for the appropriate level of surcharge order with collection order.

Introduction

On 20 November 2020 Jake Notman killed his girlfriend Lauren Bloomer in the most unexpected and frightful way. JN's trial for murder started last week but ended earlier today when the Crown accepted his plea to the lesser offence of manslaughter. On the court's direction the jury convicted him of that offence and acquitted him of murder.

Lauren Bloomer was aged 25 and a mature student at Nottingham University. She had met JN earlier in 2020 as he was coming out of a long-term relationship with another woman. By November 2020 Lauren had moved from her university accommodation to be with JN at his house in Tamworth. They had interests in common – both were fond of computer gaming. He was 27 and had a steady job at Jaguar Landrover where he had worked for the previous 7 years.

On the night of 19 November 2020, a Thursday, JN brought home a cannabis brownie from work. It was going to be a good evening, he had collected the new PS5 and they were playing on it. At some point after supper he and Lauren each had some of the brownie before going to bed. What followed was to be recorded on Lauren's phone, how or why her phone was activated is unknown. The time was around 01.15 in the early hours of 20 November. The recording shows JN becoming increasingly agitated and strange, alternately whispering and shouting, for Lauren to slap him, to reassure him, to help him, before his agitation and panic transformed into an apparent determination to kill her. Having assaulted her by choking in the bedroom upstairs, she persuaded him to go downstairs and then she followed him. He went into the kitchen, found and took out a knife and then he used it to stab Lauren repeatedly outside, before going back inside to get car keys, start his car and drive over her body in the road, shouting "I am going to make sure you're dead". The sound of these terrible events outside was captured on Lauren's phone, still recording, left upstairs inside the house. The

stabbing outside and the running over were also heard and seen by neighbours who had been woken by the shouting. One brave soul went out. He reported seeing JN, hands on knees panting, saying repeatedly “am I alive? am I alive? am I alive?” When the neighbour said “of course you are look what you have done”, JN responded that he had better kill himself and went back in. A short time later police found him curled up on the floor upstairs in a dark bedroom, still strange and agitated, making little sense. All this was recorded on their bodyworn footage.

Meantime, JN’s uncle, a paramedic, arrived and began CPR. He had been summoned earlier by Lauren who had called to report that JN was having a bad trip and needed help. Her phone showed that searches on the internet for how to cope with a bad trip had been made shortly after 0100. JN’s uncle arrived around 01.35 and was joined minutes later by ambulance staff who had come in response to an emergency call made by the neighbour. JN had by this time himself called police for help. Very sadly the combined efforts of the emergency medical staff were all in vain: Lauren was dead, having succumbed to the worst of the stab wounds which had cut the main pulmonary vein and artery near to her heart. The pathologist’s view was that she had probably died before the car was driven over her body. The post mortem examination showed that she had been stabbed 30 times, to her eyes and face as well as her chest. Wounds to her hands and arms indicated that she had tried valiantly to defend herself. The whole attack, from its start in the bedroom to its final horrific conclusion outside, lasted 2 ½ minutes.

JN was seen by paramedics and taken to hospital as a precaution. His psychotic state appears to have resolved very quickly, within a few hours.

Lauren

The effect on Lauren’s family of her killing has, of course, been devastating. The Victim Personal Statements are heart-rending and painful to read. Lauren was clearly a formidably bright and interesting young woman, funny and laughter-loving, with a Pythonesque sense of humour. An inspirational daughter and sister, loving, artistic, with a particular talent for photography, embarking on her adult life with so much to give. The family’s shock and grief is incalculable. Her mother and sister have been in court throughout, bearing with stoicism and dignity the awful evidence of Lauren’s last minutes. The court extends its deepest condolences to them all. No sentence which this court passes can undo the damage that has been done; it cannot bring Lauren back to them or lessen their grief at her loss.

The defendant – sentencing considerations

JN has pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawful act manslaughter. The Sentencing Guideline for that offence, which I must look to and follow, takes into account harm and requires the court to assess the proper level of culpability.

The harm JN caused is at the very highest level it could possibly be. A talented young woman is dead, assaulted and killed outside the home where she had chosen to be, by the person she had chosen to love. She was entitled to be safe and protected there and loved by the very person who killed her. Her shock and fear is evident from the recording captured on her phone, it is difficult and very distressing to hear now. The attack was savage, involving the use of a knife to stab her multiple times, and then a car to run her over.

JN is now aged 28. He has never before come to the attention of the police. There had been no prior report of domestic issues, whether with Lauren or his previous girlfriend or anyone else. There is nothing at all in his past which could explain the savagery of his behaviour last November; on the contrary all that I have seen and read speaks to his being a quiet and restrained young man- “in the nicest possible way a complete nerd”- as a longtime friend described him. Three consultant psychiatrists have looked at all the evidence, listened to the contemporaneous recording of the incident captured on Lauren’s phone, viewed the police body worn footage and interviewed JN. JN has no history of mental illness and was not on any medication. A number of expert reports have been produced, all anxiously considering whether and how such a small amount of cannabis could have had such a disastrous and devastating effect. None of the psychiatric experts has had experience of such a response to so low a level of the drug and there is no equivalent case reported in the literature. Yet all the psychiatrists agree that JN was floridly psychotic at the time he killed Lauren Bloomer. His mind and thinking were so distorted, he was so divorced from reality that the experts’ unanimous opinion is that he was incapable, on that awful night, of forming an intention to kill Lauren Bloomer or to cause her serious harm. It is upon that evidence that the Crown has accepted his plea to manslaughter and it is on that basis that I sentence him.

Assessing the proper level of JN’s culpability in the light of the agreed expert evidence is not straightforward. Having heard the factual evidence at trial I am quite sure that the psychotic state which JN was in that night was at least in part a response to the cannabis which he had taken. There is an obvious lesson here: that cannabis can be very dangerous, can give rise to a wholly unanticipated hallucinogenic response with potentially disastrous results. It is an illegal drug for good reason. In taking it, JN voluntarily exposed himself to the risk that it would prove dangerous, but he cannot have expected it to be that perilous. JN had used cannabis before. There is no reason to suppose that he had ever previously experienced the same reaction as he did to the cannabis brownie which he ate last November. He did not intend harm by eating the brownie. The psychiatrists are all agreed that he did not, in his disordered mental state, intend harm to Lauren when its effects had contributed to render him floridly psychotic.

Taking all this into account I have decided that culpability falls within Cat B. Lauren's death was caused in the course of an unlawful act – the assault with knife and car - which carried a high risk of death, which risk ought to have been obvious to JN. This factor, set out at Cat B in the guideline, clearly anticipates that there may be circumstances under which a defendant has not appreciated a risk which would otherwise have been obvious. That was the case here. I cannot find, as Mr Fisher urged me to, that in circumstances where JN was so psychotic that he had lost touch with reality his culpability falls to be considered at the lowest level. This is not such a case, when the risk of the actions of choking, stabbing and running over were so very obvious and, crucially, where the fact that they were not obvious to JN was because he had taken an illegal drug. That his response to that drug was so extreme and so unanticipated in my view falls to be considered as a mitigating factor at Step 2 in the guideline, not as a matter affecting consideration of the level of culpability at Step 1.

Mr Douglas Jones submitted that the extreme nature of JN's acts raised the proper level to Cat A, however where the attack itself, though severe, was relatively short-lived I decline to take that approach. The number and nature of the aggravating features raise the proper level to a point well within the range for Cat A in any event. Those features are the choking – itself a very frightening and dangerous act - ,and then the use of two weapons – knife and car -, the domestic setting, the fact that Lauren was killed in the street, in public, and that her mental and physical suffering, though mercifully short, would have been extreme. These are all powerful considerations, which raise the starting point to 15 years, before mitigation.

As to mitigation, JN has no previous convictions. He has from the start expressed remorse and concern for the grief he has caused. He has done so to all the psychiatrists, through his counsel today and to the court through a letter. I have read about his family and his background, how he has conducted himself in his personal relationships with others, and I have had the opportunity to watch him at trial. I am quite certain that his remorse and sense of guilt is genuine and lasting. He is a broken young man. Though that is nothing, as his counsel has rightly said, to the anguish which his actions have caused to Lauren's family.

These are weighty mitigating factors. There are two further points of mitigation: the first is the wholly unexpected and unforeseen nature of JN's reaction to the cannabis which he took. Most unusually, the expert psychiatrists had a contemporaneous window into the workings of JN's mind that night, through the recording on Lauren's phone and, to a lesser extent, the police bodyworn footage. That has enabled them to say with confidence that he was severely psychotic, his mind radically unhinged, at the time. This cannot wholly extinguish his culpability, or even reduce it very substantially, since cannabis is an illegal drug which JN took voluntarily, but the unforeseen extremity of the resulting mental disorder does serve to mitigate the offence.

All these mitigating factors reduce the sentence to one of 13 years, before consideration of discount for plea. As to this, the position is once more far from straightforward. JN has always accepted his responsibility for killing Lauren Bloomer. Before the expert medical and psychiatric evidence led the lawyers down potential paths of insanity and diminished responsibility he offered a plea to manslaughter which the Crown did not at that time accept. Those legal detours were proper ones to investigate, on the state of the expert evidence as it then was. It was not until well into trial that the expert psychiatric view, and thus the legal position, became clear. This delay in resolving matters is not to be held against JN who, as I have said, has always accepted his responsibility and indicated a plea to manslaughter at the outset. Having regard to the overarching Guideline on reduction in sentence for a guilty plea I conclude that it would have been unreasonable to have expected JN to enter a plea to unlawful act manslaughter any sooner than he did and that he is therefore entitled to the full one third reduction for his plea.

Sentence

Jake Notman, please stand up.

The sentence for the offence of unlawful act manslaughter is one of 8 years and 8 months imprisonment. You will be released from custody no later than two-thirds of the way through the sentence, namely 5 years and 9 months, and the remainder of the sentence will be served on licence in the community. You must comply with all the conditions of your licence, failing which you will be at risk of recall to prison to serve the remainder of the term in custody. The time you have already served on remand will be taken into account automatically