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Police say victim knew murderer West Liberty case centers on softball bat

Dave Gosch

Gazette staff writer Corey Wieneke knew the person who bludgeoned him to death with a softball bat. That's what authorities said Thursday as they tried to track down the owner of the bat believed to have been used in the murder at a rural West Liberty house.

"I guess about the best we can tell, it was an acquaintance of his or someone who knew him. There's not a mad dog killer running around," said Sgt. Greg Orr, investigator with the Muscatine County Sheriff's Department.

Wieneke, 22, was found dead around 6 p.m. Tuesday in the bedroom of his home by his fiancée, Jody Hotz.

Wieneke, the late-shift bartender at his grandmother's West Liberty tavern, died from blunt trauma to the body. It's believed the trauma was inflicted by an aluminum softball bat found one mile away from Wieneke's home on a gravel road about three miles west of West Liberty.

That bat seems to be the focus of the investigation as authorities try to determine where the bat was bought and who bought it.

"We've found out about it, but we're kind of withholding that. We know places that carry it. That's what we're tracking down," he said.

Orr said some information must be kept from the public when there are things that only the authorities and the killer know.

"Rumors get to flying and we need to sort out the chaff from the facts," he said.

Sorting out who bought the softball bat may be difficult, according to Ivan Rosalski.

Rosalski is a technical adviser for American Modern Metals, a Kearny, N.J., firm that makes Power Flite Heavyweight bats for the Marshall Clark Co. Power Flite Heavyweight is the brand name of what is believed to be the murder weapon.

"It's going to be a tough one because it's a good-selling bat," said Rosalski. "If they bought it just for the crime, and you get a hold of them right away, you might get the person in the sporting goods department (remembering) who bought it."

The bat still had a bar code affixed to it and the corners weren't worn. That may be an indication that the bat was recently bought, or at least, it wasn't used during the softball season.

That may also be supported by the fact that the print on the bat was not smudged. Rosalski said the paint on such bats can be easily smudged during the course of a softball season.

Rosalski said many stores begin to clear their racks of softball bats in July and August as the season wears down. He said

the Power Flite Heavyweight is often sold at Wal-Mart.

A spokeswoman at Wal-Mart's corporate office in Bentonville, Ark., said she couldn't comment on customer purchases and referred all questions to local law enforcement authorities.

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