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Who Killed Willie Muldrew?

On January 5, 1967, Willie Muldrew won the Al Knudson Award, given to the outstanding sophomore player at the annual Cyclone Football Recognition Banquet. In his first year on the Iowa State University (ISU) varsity football team, the 6'2", 230 lb. defensive tackle proved his talent. Within sixteen months though, Willie Muldrew died from a bullet wound to the chest, shot by his girlfriend of a year and a half.

In the spring of 1968, Willie Muldrew joined the twenty-four other ISU black athletes who submitted a number of complaints to the Iowa State Athletic Council. They questioned the discriminatory treatment of several coaches, requested to be called "black" or "Afro-American," and asked that black coaches and administrators be hired, in addition to other demands. If these demands were not met, the black athletes threatened to boycott their respective teams and forfeit their scholarships the following season. In early July the Athletic Council agreed to some of the demands, but disputed the claim of discriminatory treatment on the part of coaches.

In addition, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrations by black students against questionable treatment on campus, and especially in athletics, resulted in the formation of the Black Student Organization (BSO). Willie Muldrew was elected Vice-President of the BSO. A "White Support Group" soon organized to Support the BSO. In early August, the *Iowa State Daily* reported that seven black students, including Willie Muldrew and Don Graves of the football team, had left the university over their dispute with the Athletic Council. Newly hired football coach, Johnny Majors, quickly reported that Muldrew was still enrolled in school and he planned to play in the fall.

The fall of 1968 brought the announcement of a new course to be offered, "Black and White in America" on the ISU campus.

Willie Muldrew participated in fall preseason drills, but dropped off the football team before the first game. He remained in school on a scholarship obtained for him by friends and was reported to be negotiating for a professional football contract in the spring.

This paper will analyze the sporting and social events leading up to Muldrew's death and the subsequent trial of his accused killer, Beth Aronoff, the daughter of a former ISU professor of biochemistry and biophysics and a current professor at Marshalltown Community College. The paper will also analyze several questions, some answerable and some not, surrounding the life of Willie Muldrew during his three years at Iowa State University. How did Muldrew and Aronoff meet and what caused Aronoff to shoot and kill Muldrew? What verdict did the jury render and why? Why did Muldrew take a leadership role among the black athletes and the BSO? Why did Muldrew leave the team in his senior year? Was Muldrew an angry and abusive black man as Aronoff testified, or a gentle giant who would never hurt anyone as noted by his teammates? Primary sources used for this paper include newspapers such as the *Des Moines Register*, *Ames Daily Tribune*, *Iowa State Daily*, and *Chicago Defender*; Iowa State University football programs, press guides, and yearbooks; interviews of teammates, family, and friends; and information from the Story County, Iowa Courthouse files.