

First of all



Privé-beelden

On a hot afternoon in the summer, German fitness influencer Sammy Baker (23) is shot dead by the police in a courtyard garden in Amsterdam. His parents do not understand that at all.

From **Maud Effting** and **Mark Misérus**

Then the cops shoot. Sammy is dead

Fifteen minutes before three Amsterdam agents will point their guns at him, Sammy Baker (23) stands in the bushes of a courtyard garden in Amsterdam-West. It is the 13th of august, around half past four in the afternoon, and it's about 32 degrees. In the past few days there has been a heat wave. Sammy has been hiding in those bushes. The young German has a knife with him, which he keeps on his throat. Otherwise he is silent. He has taken off almost all his clothes. Only his boxer shorts and his green T-shirt he still wears. And his sunglasses. The knife has a blade of about 7 centimeters long, the lawyer of his parents will tell you later. A boy scout's knife, that's what he calls it. His mother gave it to him as a present on his 10th birthday. Samuel is a beautiful boy. He is a model and a popular fitness enthusiast. Dark eyes, dark hair, bright white teeth and a muscular body that has been trained to perfection. Pretty much every day he posts movies or pictures of himself while he is training. He comes from a town near Frankfurt, Germany. Officially his name is Samuel, but everyone else calls him Sammy. Sammy Baker, after his father's last name. A few days before he left for Amsterdam, he led a life that looked happy to the outside world. With divorced but loving parents, a university education that went easy on him, and 170 thousand follower on Instagram, who wanted to know how

they could get a body just like him. But now he stands here, hidden in the green. Around him, seven policemen from the Amsterdam police force have gathered. And outside the fences another four. For fifteen minutes the cops try to get him to come out of the bushes. They speak English to him. German. Dutch. According to eyewitnesses they say they want to help him, and ask him to please drop the knife. They ask if he can lie down on the ground. Sammy hardly responds to their questions. He just stands there, with that knife on his throat. Dazed. Confused. A cop pulls his gun.

'I was less than 250 meter away from him'

'I was very close,' says Justine, Sammy's mother. She can barely bear to talk about this moment, but she does. I was here,' she says, 'in Amsterdam. Less than 250 meters away from him'. Justine and Sammy's father Kai talk to de Volkskrant, to tell who their son was: Sammy Baker, the 23-year-old boy who died on August 13. He was killed in a confused state by at least three police bullets. They were shot at him from close range. Sammy's parents tell their story because they want answers about the death of their son and because they want to prevent this from happening to others.

Over the past four months, more and more questions have entered their minds. Why did the police shoot their son when they could see he was confused? Why did they attack him with seven men and a threatening police dog? Why wasn't there anyone from the Crisis Service who could have talked to Sammy? The police knew about his mental state,' says Justine. All ranks of the police are closed. The National Criminal Investigation Department's investigation into the shooting incident is ongoing, and before the results appear (soon), the police say they can't and shouldn't react to anything. That is why Sammy's parents have been trying for weeks now to find out for themselves what led to the death of their son. Through the hashtag #justiceforsammy_bkr they draw attention to what happened to him. The Dutch lawyer Richard Korver assists them. Sammy was their only child. Sammy's mother is a teacher of English and German literature, his father works for Lufthansa. After his death they are overwhelmed with reactions from all over the world. Through Instagram Sammy had contact with followers from all over the world. Behind Sammy's somewhat superficial image as an influencer was a boy who was smart with a great mindset, they say: Sammy studied environmental management at the university. He wanted to become a teacher,' says his father Kai, 'but things went so well at Instagram that he had switched to a somewhat lighter study at university. I always said to him: do what your heart tells you'. Sammy's talent for sports turns out when he plays basketball at the age of 5. He's small, but fast as lightning.

Later he starts working out. With success: his workouts in the gym attract more and more followers, the first companies start to send him clothing and food products so he can advertise them. Everything he did, he took seriously,' says Justine. He was one of the most disciplined people I know. If we had a glass of wine at dinner, he'd refuse. That wasn't good for his muscle development. He could get into those things all the time. That's why I never worried about him. I trusted him. He always ensured that he could manage on his own. Their son had a caring character, his parents say. According to them, he never had any mental problems. Rather the other way around, they say. After Sammy's death, a follower informed them that their son would have prevented him from attempting suicide.

Off to Amsterdam for his birthday

His 23rd birthday had to be special. Every year Sammy turns his birthday into something special. He celebrated his 21st birthday in Las Vegas, last year he was in Bangkok with friends. This year it was the Netherlands. With a friend he drove on August 10 from Germany to an Airbnb in Amsterdam. That night he would turn 23. His parents say that Sammy, to their knowledge, did not take drugs. Yet that night he went to a coffee shop with friends.



I said: I don't know what's going on, but he seems disoriented and confused. He needs help.

Justine reported her son missing

Confused people **First of all**



Sammy's parents Kai and Justine. The police knew about his mental state,' says Justine. On the left page pictures of Sammy of his Instagram account, where he has 170 thousand followers as a fitnessinfluencer.

Foto Jiri Büller / de Volkskrant

We assume that he has consumed weed,' says attorney Korver. Toxicological research has to show how much that was. What are young people doing when they're celebrating their birthdays in Amsterdam,' says his mother Justine. I think he wanted to have a try. And that things went wrong then. That night Sammy started behaving strangely, his friends will tell them later. They walked the streets together, had a discussion and all of a sudden he wanted to be on his own,' says Kai. 'It wasn't until the next morning that he returned to that Airbnb. Consuming weed can cause an acute psychosis: you see delusions, hear voices, get anxious. Due to the high THC content. I called the next morning to congratulate him,' says his father.

I called the next morning to congratulate him,' says his father. He was very quiet, but I didn't think about it too long. I thought: he must have had a long night. When Justine calls him, he hangs up. She sends him a whatsapp to ask if everything goes well. No,' replies Sammy. For her that's the sign that something is completely wrong. Normally her son always sends back a smiling selfie after such a question. I called the friend with whom he had come,' she says. He said he was concerned. From that moment on she hardly gets in touch with her son. His phone is turned off a large part of the time. What exactly does he do? They only know bits and pieces. Does he use more drugs? Weed? Shrooms? Other drugs?

Was he partying? Did he become psychotic? We have many questions,' says Justine. His friends also hardly managed to get in touch with him: they didn't know where he was. In clear moments he pinpointed his location to me,' says Justine. But if his friends went there to check it out, he'd already disappeared. His friend drove through Amsterdam for hours and hours to find him. And at a certain moment, his cell phone was offline, too. According to Sammy's parents there's also a rumour from the police that in that time he was involved in an incident with two women: a man tried to steal a bicycle from them.

In their report, however, the women say that the perpetrator spoke 'perfect Dutch' or 'accentless Dutch'. On August 12th, Justine is so worried that in the evening she calls the Amsterdam police and reports him missing. I said: 'I don't know what's going on, but he seems disoriented and confused. He needs help. She didn't sleep that night.

'I didn't know him like that at all. He seemed frightened'

The next day Justine gets in her car and drives directly to the Netherlands. In the back-seat there are flyers with a picture of Sammy, ready for distribution in Amsterdam. When she arrives and meets one of his friends, her phone suddenly lights up. An unknown number. Sammy. With the borrowed phone of an Amsterdam woman, he calls her and he knows her number by heart. Immediately he tells her where he is: the Rijswijkstraat, a good 1 kilometer away. She drives to him by car. I hugged him', she says. I was so happy. I thought: now we get a happy ending'. She gets him in her car and starts talking to him. He had already thrown his things in the trunk. But all of a sudden he jumps back out. Sammy wants to look in her bag and doesn't seem to trust her. He says hardly anything. All the time he keeps his sunglasses on. I said, 'Sam, whatever happened, come home. We'll find a solution, I'll help you. It's okay, trust me. I love you.' Every time he walks away from the car. I felt like he was paranoid,' she says. I didn't know him like that at all. He seemed frightened. I said: look into my eyes. But I couldn't reach him. In desperation she calls his father. Talk to him,' says Justine. It was the longest two minutes of my life,' says Kai. 'I talked and talked. But he didn't answer back.' For an hour Justine talks to her son. The police drove circles around us,' she says. One of Sammy's friends went to them and told them that this was the boy who was missing. And that he was in an unstable condition. That he wasn't doing well. At one point a policeman came up to us. He asked kindly: are you okay? Then it goes fast, she says. Sammy ran away so fast he lost his flip-flops. The policeman ran after him. And so did his friend.' She remains at her car. For her this is one of the hardest moments. I still don't understand why I didn't go after it. Why didn't I run? Why didn't I move? She says she was exhausted, that she hadn't eaten and drunk all day. But there was something else that also played a role: 'I thought the police would help him,' she says.

'Stand still', the cops shout in the courtyard garden

In the corner of the courtyard garden on the Honselersdijkstraat Sammy leaves the bushes minutes later and starts walking, as can be seen in a video made by Parool reporter and resident Ruben Kooops. With the knife at his throat. Sammy's friend was in the area,' says Justine. He asked the police if he could talk to him. But because Sammy didn't answer, they wouldn't let him'. Three policemen have now raised their guns. From a distance they point it at him.

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Sammy moves slowly towards the cops. He almost strolls. Once in a while he stands still, as if he hesitates what he should do. Barefoot and in his underpants he walks slowly through the garden, while neighbors watch from their balconies.

Later, the Amsterdam police chief Frank Paauw in Het Parool says that the situation is 'out of control' from the moment Sammy starts walking. As a result, he can be a danger to the people he meets.

Stay still', a policeman shouts in English. Don't move. Otherwise we have to shoot. Sammy holds the knife to his throat. His T-shirt is rolled up. On the video you can hear that the tension in the police is increasing. Keep low', the cops yell at each other.

Keep that line of fire low.

Yes yes', a policeman calls back.

Yeah, yeah. Stay still', they roar again in his direction. Don't move.

The police don't call on the Amsterdam crisis service, which can send nurses or psychiatrists to talk to confused people and calm them down, says chairman Elnathan Prinsen of the Dutch Association for Psychiatry four days later in Het Parool. According to him, that might have been better; police officers are insufficiently trained to defuse threatening situations with confused people.

Paauw says that 'negotiators were on their way to the situation' to talk to Sammy. They just didn't arrive on time. However, behind Sammy's back a policeman with a police dog approaches, pulling the line wildly and restlessly. Police dogs are, after firearms, the heaviest means of violence the police are allowed to use against civilians.

tegen burgers mag inzetten.

Then Sammy stands still. Suddenly the dog handler starts with his police dog, but instead of grabbing him, the dog runs past Sammy. The handler tries to bring Sammy to the ground. This is followed by a struggle, in which possibly the police dog attacks him as well. On the camera images you can hear a terrible scream of Sammy. During the struggle Sammy stabs a policeman in his vest, the police reports later. The policeman is not injured. Then three shots follow. At close range. In the chaos the cops start shouting at each other. Stay down, they roar. Line of fire. Sammy dies on the spot. The cops have tried to resuscitate him.

When the shots sound, Justine is terrified. What's that?', she asks her sister, who she has called in panic. Calm down,' says her sister. It doesn't have to do anything with Sammy. A little later officers ask Justine to come with them to the police station. A policeman hands her Sammy's silver necklace. It is cut through.

‘He was a patient, not a suspect’

What happened at the time of Sammy's death? To what extent were the officers trained to deal with his confused behavior? Police chief Paauw said two days after Sammy's death in Het Parool that his people had acted in good conscience. According to him 'no officer goes to work with the idea of shooting someone that day'.

As an officer, you have to decide in a split second whether someone is a danger to himself or his surroundings. This is very difficult.

Jan Struijs
Police union

Policemen had to do this,' said Paauw. But at the same time they feel the sorrow that a person has died here. He insisted that an electric shock weapon would have made the difference between life and death here.

The Dutch police have been raising the alarm for years about the increasing number of confused people they have to deal with. In a recent survey by research platform Investico among more than a thousand police officers, about which Trouw and De Groene Amsterdammer wrote, three quarters regularly admit that they often feel helpless when confronted with people suffering from psychological problems. They feel unqualified to deal with them. According to the interviewees, there is hardly any attention for confused people during police training.

We are trained to deal with all kinds of people, including those who show deviant behavior', says a spokesperson of the police. But we are not healthcare providers or psychiatrists. Our task is not to diagnose such a person, but to get the situation under control'.

Three-quarters of the police officers report having made a mistake in one or more situations in which things got out of hand: they were attacked or the confused person did something to himself. According to many of the officers interviewed, their current armament is unsuitable and there is a great need to use tasers.

As a policeman, you have to decide in a split second whether someone is a danger to himself, to those around him,' says Jan Struijs, chairman of the police union. This is very difficult, especially if someone doesn't respond to what the police asks. You scare up the police with something that actually belongs somewhere else.

We always try to avoid the use of violent means,' says the police spokesperson, who does not want to specifically comment on Sammy's death because of the current National Criminal Investigation Department's search. But sometimes the situation could not be any other way, because somebody is dangerous or attacks colleagues. Or isn't talking the solution? Of course we always try to make contact. But if someone walks ahead with a knife, there's not much to talk about'.

But Sammy did not behave in a threatening way,' says Richard Korver, Sammy's parents' lawyer. He was a patient, not a suspect. A young man with a knife with a blade of only 7 centimeters. It looks as if he was in a psychosis. They should have been deescalating. The police report that he made a stabbing move. But that's very explainable, when you are unexpectedly attacked from behind and a dog is involved'.

Sammy's parents don't understand any of the police's actions. In a city where drugs like weed and hash are legal, policemen have to be trained to deal with confused people,' says an exhausted Justine . It surprises us that someone who behaves like Sammy doesn't get the help he needs. They have treated him like a criminal.