

Boy's body puts D'Wan Sims case back in spotlight: Tests will determine if Ga. skeleton is that of Detroit boy, 4, lost at Livonia mall in 1994

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On Feb. 26, a gravedigger in suburban Atlanta found the decomposed remains of a little boy in a wooded area near a church cemetery.

Since then, the search for that boy's identity has stretched from Houston to Metro Detroit.

This week, Detroit police will use the results of a blood test to determine if the body is that of **D'Wan Sims**, reported missing from the Wonderland Mall in Livonia by his mother in 1994, sparking an intense search. He was 4.

Blood samples from Dwanna Jackson, the boy's mother, and his grandmother, Beverly Harris, were collected by police this week and will be shipped to a Maryland laboratory. Technicians will compare genetic material in the blood to DNA from muscle fibers found in the remains from Georgia.

Detroit Police Cmdr. Dennis Richardson doesn't expect an answer quickly. And some investigators believe the boy found in Georgia was too young to be **D'Wan**.

"The DNA results may take months before we find out the results, but we will find out if it is **D'Wan Sims** and we can finally put it to rest. But we just don't know at this time," Richardson said.

The investigation here has focused largely on the mother, Dwanna Jackson, who police said failed two lie detector tests when answering questions about her son's disappearance. Police said they could find no evidence that she went to the shopping center with her son the day he disappeared.

Jackson, who could not be reached Thursday, has maintained that her son disappeared at the mall. Although she was questioned again for 14 hours in July, police have said they are expanding their investigation to include known sex offenders in Livonia.

The possibility that the body found in Georgia was that of **D'Wan Sims** was first raised by investigators from Georgia's DeKalb County Medical Examiner's office, who determined the child could have been as young as 5 and as old as 8. **D'Wan** would have turned 9 this October.

Paul Kelhofer, chief investigator for the medical examiner, said that in an effort to determine the identity of the child, his office consulted with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Arlington, Va.

"They found matches for about 25 missing children in that age range, **D'Wan**'s name was on that list and we began discussions with people in Detroit," Kelhofer said.

So far, most of the other children have been eliminated in discussions with other police forces. Angelo McNeil, a missing boy from Houston, was eliminated this summer when blood samples from that boy's family did not match the body. Body yields few clues

Investigators haven't determined how the boy died, Kelhofer said.

Forensic evidence indicates that the child died between August and December of 1998, he said. The remains of the boy -- who was wearing size 8 reddish-purple jeans, a long-sleeve pullover and children's size 11 Timberland boots -- had become mostly skeletonized.

The Metro Detroit investigation into **D'Wan**'s disappearance was initially led by the Livonia Police Department and has been taken up by Detroit's Violent Crimes Task Force, which includes officers from other Wayne County municipalities.

Livonia Police said Thursday that they believe the child from Georgia was too old to be **D'Wan Sims**.

Some investigators in Georgia echo that belief.

"The skeleton was just too young," DeKalb County Sheriff's Detective Chris Harvey said.

Richardson, the Detroit commander, said his office thinks that it should run down every tip.

Officials at the DeKalb medical examiner's office have urged Detroit officials to forward the blood sample, if for no other reason than to eliminate one more possibility in a difficult case.

"We usually always find an identity -- especially for a child. But so far nothing in this case," said Gerald Gowitt, DeKalb County's associate chief medical examiner. "I've have never seen a child who didn't get identified."

Keeping hope

Beverly Harris, **D'Wan**'s grandmother, in an interview Thursday, reiterated that her daughter had nothing to do with the boy's disappearance. But she said that five years of police scrutiny has strained their family.

"Just think about trying to function everyday with a missing child under all of the scrutiny and everything that has been said about my family," Harris said. "I can't begin to tell you how it has been, how my crying spells have not ended."

She hopes that the investigation doesn't end with the discovery of a body. "What I hope is that my little boy comes home."

Ron Jones, **D'Wan**'s case manager at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, said that while there's always hope, the odds of finding children alive grows slimmer each year they're missing. "I would love to find him alive. There have been cases where we've found children alive 20 and 30 years later. But statistically, you have to say no. But you have to keep up hope. It's what keeps us going."

Detroit News Staff Writers David G. Grant and Steve Pardo contributed to this report.

Caption: Blood samples from Dwanna Harris, mother of **D'Wan Sims**, will be compared with genetic material from the remains. Clarence Tabb Jr. / The Detroit News

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