

## **WOULD - BE VICTIM LED COPS TO SUSPECT PROSTITUTE IDENTIFIED HER ATTACKER ON STREET**

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After months of chasing bad tips, vague leads and wrong **suspects** , detectives hunting the Woodward Corridor serial killer got their big break from a streetwise prostitute who narrowly escaped the man's clutches last winter.

Last week, the woman rode with a detective in an unmarked police car until she saw the man who assaulted her in an abandoned building, police said.

The man, Benjamin (Tony) Atkins, was picked up by police, who said he later confessed **to** killing 11 women.

The woman who escaped probably **would** have been the first **victim** , people close **to** the investigation said.

"No question she **would** have been," one source said. "The next time, he killed. He got better." Officials close **to** the investigation gave these details:

Last December in a vacant Highland Park restaurant on Woodward near an abandoned motel where three bodies were found, Atkins paid the woman for sex. She knew him from the neighborhood. When they were finished, the woman got nervous and she struggled with Atkins.

"She said, 'I couldn't figure out what else he was going **to** do but kill me, so I got away,' " the source said. "She was pretty street smart, pretty wise. . . . She ran out of the place naked."

A passerby saw them struggling and his presence scared Atkins off.

The woman has been working with a task force of investigators for several weeks. She helped clear an earlier **suspect** whose home had been raided by telling detectives he was not her assailant.

On Thursday, she cruised the Woodward Corridor with police until she spotted Atkins on Woodward just south of Highland Park in Detroit.

Detroit homicide detectives questioned Atkins and he quickly confessed **to** the 11 killings.

Detectives had been looking at Atkins for some time, but he was not the prime **suspect** until the prostitute identified him. On Monday, detectives were satisfied Atkins has killed no one else, officials said.

Atkins, 23, is charged with three counts of first-degree murder in slayings in Highland Park and Detroit. Highland Park Public Safety Director John Mattox said police will seek charges against him in eight other homicides.

The women all were black and believed **to be** crack cocaine addicts. Police said Atkins lured them with the drug into abandoned buildings along a 1.4-mile stretch of Woodward and strangled them. Most of the women were bound, gagged and at least partially disrobed.

His confessions were so complete that police have little doubt he is the killer. He knew minute details of the crimes down **to** the color of some of the women's clothing. He also told them the location of a dead woman found Friday at Woodward and West Grand Avenue in Highland Park. The body has not been identified.

Atkins briefly explained his motivation for killing the women, saying they were "bitches and whores," a source said. He also was a crack user and blamed a bad childhood, officials said.

He said his mother was a prostitute who turned tricks in her car in front of him and his older brother. He also said that at age 15, he woke up **to** find a man performing oral sex on him.

Police described Atkins as intelligent and well-spoken, with a sizeable vocabulary. He said he considered turning himself in before his arrest.

In his confessions, Atkins appeared **to** become sexually aroused and told of dreaming of the killings, officials said.

Sources close **to** the investigation said evidence against Atkins is slim other than the confessions, but detectives are hoping **to** match his fingerprints and bodily fluids **to** those found at some of the crime scenes.

DNA testing on some fluid samples found at the crime scenes came from two different men and police hope further tests show one is Atkins.

Caption: Photo Color

: Benjamin Atkins \*\*\*

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