GOOD COP BAD COP

A computer system for tracking the behavior of LAPD officers has been in the works for over 11 years

By [Bobbi Murray](#)

As investigations go forward, Los Angeles police officials carefully refrain from publicly making judgements about the recent videotaped flashlight beating of suspect Stanley Miller by a Los Angeles Police Department officer. But LAPD Chief William Bratton was frank in one assessment before City Council last week when he called the tactics used by the eight officers involved in the arrest "a mess." Bratton criticized a flying tackle by one officer, along with an apparent kick to the suspect's face by another.

"Tactically," he said, "we've got a lot of issues with our officers' performance in this matter."

That's one reason the officers' tactical training will be scrutinized as part of the internal LAPD investigation, along with records of use-of-force incidents, complaints, and commendations. It's a ground-floor step in a complex probe and, in 2004, you might think that it would be a simple one: Just go to a computer, do a search, and pull up all the files.

But you'd be wrong. Instead of being accessible with a few keystrokes, the files must be hand-searched. The current LAPD computer tracking system only provides a rudimentary sketch of an officer's background. That means a supervisor can get a computer report that some compare to a DMV printout, with, for example, a notation about a citizen complaint, but no details about the incident. "You can run an employee's personnel history and it will point you to events," explains Deputy Chief George Gascon. "But in order to read the details about the event, you have to go to the hard copy and read it. Those hard copies are generally filed at Parker Center." That means a supervisor at Devonshire or Southeast or anywhere else in the city would have to drive downtown for more information.

A more comprehensive tracking system that brings all the records together is now 15 months behind schedule, one set out by the 2001 federal consent decree between the city and the U.S. Department of Justice. The $30 million system, called TEAMS II, is designed to flag inadequate training that could lead to bad tactics and discern patterns that could alert a supervisor to an officer with a penchant for excessive force. Deputy Chief David Doan, commanding officer of the TEAMS II Development Bureau, says that TEAMS II will establish norms and alert supervisors when officers exceed them. "If an officer accounts for more use-of-force than people in his or her peer group, there will be a reason for a supervisor to see why they are outside the norm," says Doan. It will also notify the chain of command of the supervisor's activity.

Says Gascon, "TEAMS II will automatically raise a question mark, will automatically prompt a supervisor to look at things that today we have to do manually." With the current system, warning signals only turn up during a review, he says, if the supervisor pulls the hard-copy files in a process Gascon terms "laborious."

It's entirely too soon to say whether having TEAMS II in place could have headed off trouble in the most recent case - police investigators have yet to determine whether there was inappropriate use-of-force, and the District Attorney's office is conducting a probe to determine whether criminal charges are warranted. But the incident puts a spotlight on the long-time lack of a computer risk monitoring system that should be standard practice for a department the size of the LAPD. And certainly it's problematic that the federal consent decree may be extended because TEAMS II won't be up and running by the deadline.

But given the troubled history of the computer tracking system's development, a 15-month lag seems almost negligible. Some might say that the system is behind by years, given that it was first recommended in 1991 by the blue ribbon Christopher Commission that investigated the Rodney King beating.

The first attempt to get a tracking system up and running was in 1993, when two members of the Police Commission, the civilian board-of-directors of the LAPD, tried to pry money loose from the department, but were unable to do so. Then-Chief Willie Williams petitioned then-Mayor Richard Riordan's office for funding, but was turned down. Police commissioners and city council members involved said later that they encountered stiff resistance from within the department itself, which in the mid-1990s had still not shifted its culture toward the embrace of reform. Department critics, particularly defense attorneys, say there is a negative incentive for a police department to have such a system because it would make information on officers' backgrounds infinitely more accessible to defense counsel and civil rights litigators.

In 1994, the Police Commission finally squeezed $39,000 from its own budget to fund a part-time systems analyst to pull department databases into a system called the Officer Behavioral Internal Tracking System, which went by the unfortunate acronym OBITS. The name was later changed to TEAMS - Training Evaluation and Management System.

It was still woefully inadequate, and in 1997, then-Police Commission President Raymond Fisher approached the Clinton Administration Department of Justice for funds for a study. That was the very first step toward TEAMS II. It took eight months to get funding for the study. Some bureaucratic glitches delayed its implementation, then in the years that followed, the Rampart scandal unfolded, which involved unlawful arrests and planted evidence by LAPD officers. There was then another funding application to the DOJ, another changeover in police chiefs from Willie Williams to Bernard Parks, and a long bidding process to get a vendor to build TEAMS II. There were also some slight upgrades of the present system, known now as TEAMS 1.5.

"You could have built a rocket to the moon from the time they first started until now," lamented Gary

Greenebaum in 1999, the former police commissioner who had first sought funds in 1993.

Councilman Dennis Zine, a former police officer who sits on the City Council's Public Safety Committee, unconsciously echoed that sentiment recently in complaining about the current delays. "If we can put a man on the moon," he groused, "why can't we develop a system to track officers?"

Meanwhile, the city continues to pay out millions in LAPD-related settlements made from 1999 through 2003, a figure that includes the so-called "Rampart effect": payouts on lawsuits stemming from the scandal, that bump the numbers up higher than average. It was the Rampart debacle, though, that led to the consent decree that may have ultimately put TEAMS II on the fast track. Or faster track, at least.

"The consent decree has given us a tight schedule to follow," allowed Deputy Chief Doan, charged with moving the TEAMS II development forward. Doan says that the department is on target to meet a September deadline for the design of a prototype of a key piece of TEAMS II, a risk management information system. He expects full deployment of the TEAMS II system a year from now. The city itself is now paying for the system.

Once it is completely built, getting TEAMS II up to speed will involve uploading an astounding amount of information - commendations, complaints, and personnel records for the LAPD's 9,000-plus officers. Doan is enthusiastic about the possibilities: the ability for authorized personnel to read full use-of-force and personnel reports on-line, the ability to pinpoint officer deployment and keep track of who worked with whom on any given day, all quickly and from a supervisor's computer terminal.

When the new system goes on line, Doan says, "We'll turn off the old TEAMS. We won't use it anymore."

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