

Records: Victim was too drugged to drive; A newlywed was so drugged up, it would have been impossible for her to have driven away, as her husband contends, according to court papers released Wednesday.; MIAMI-DADE The Miami Herald August 18, 2005 Thursday F1 EDITION

The Miami Herald

Found on Miami.com

The Miami Herald

August 18, 2005 Thursday F1 EDITION

SECTION: B; Pg. 4

LENGTH: 587 words

HEADLINE: Records: Victim was too drugged to drive; A newlywed was so drugged up, it would have been impossible for her to have driven away, as her husband contends, according to court papers released Wednesday.; MIAMI-DADE

BYLINE: BY DAVID OVALLE;
dovalle@herald.com

BODY:

Inside Wendy Trapaga's body, medical examiners found sleeping pills, pain killers and anti-anxiety medicine.

That means her body would have been so drugged up, she couldn't have driven away after a fight with her new husband, as he contends, just hours before she was found beaten to death.

The detail was disclosed in court papers released Wednesday in the arrest of Michel Escoto, who was charged this week with murdering his new bride in 2002.

Escoto -- who weeks before the murder had taken out a \$1 million policy on Trapaga -- had claimed his wife stormed off after an argument shortly before she was found bludgeoned to death next to a Dumpster in Medley.

The drugs would "have caused her to be extremely lethargic," Miami-Dade Detective John Butchko wrote in court documents. "The fact that the victim's body had no defensive wounds was consistent with her intoxicated state and reflected a person with so little control over their body they could not have been expected to drive anywhere."

The arrest came days after Escoto dropped a claim to the life insurance policy on Trapaga -- and making contradictory statements during civil court testimony.

At a news conference on Wednesday, Trapaga's family floated their theory:

Interpreting a home pregnancy test, Escoto convinced his girlfriend she was pregnant, sparking their rushed wedding -- and her murder to cash in on the life insurance policy.

"He's really arrogant and he thinks he's smarter than everyone else," said Jorge Borron, an attorney for Trapaga's mother, Myriam Benitez.

Trapaga and Escoto had met in early 2002 and by July were living in a Miami Beach efficiency. In August 2002, they took out \$1 million life insurance policies on each other.

About 10 days before they eloped to the Keys, Trapaga called her mother with the happy news.

"She told me I was going to be a grandma,"

Benitez said at the tearful news conference.

When Benitez suggested to her daughter she immediately begin prenatal care, Escoto stepped in and told her no -- it would be too stressful, Benitez said.

An autopsy later revealed Trapaga was not pregnant.

Escoto told detectives his version: On Oct. 14, 2002, after a night of partying and a brief stay at a hotel near Miami International Airport, he and his new bride began arguing. The reason: he had found she lied about being pregnant.

According to Escoto, she stormed off in her car.

An hour later, her body was found behind the Medley Dumpster.

During their investigation, detectives say, Escoto was uncooperative -- he refused to give DNA samples or to undergo a polygraph test. But during the civil trial over the insurance policy, he was compelled to testify and made inconsistent statements about that night.

For example, he initially told police that he and his wife left the hotel about 3:45 a.m.

But during the civil trial, he testified he left at 3 a.m. -- and according to cellphone records, shortly thereafter, he made a phone call just blocks from the crime scene.

Phone records showed Escoto exchanged several calls the morning of the murder with Yolanda Cerrillo, at the time his ex-girlfriend.

Escoto said he was checking on Cerrillo's daughter, who had been sick for a week. However, police found a witness who said the

little girl had been fine.

"He was the last person to have seen the victim alive. No one can vouch for his whereabouts, nor for those of his girlfriend Yolanda Cerrillo, at the time the killing took place," Detective Butchko wrote.