Forensic Pathologist Dr. Michael Baden Summarizes Evidence in Chandra Levy Case

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Description

NBC's Matt Lauer interviews forensic pathologist Dr. Michael Baden about skeletal, tissue, and ligature evidence in the Chandra Levy case, the subject of Baden's book, "Dead Reckoning."

Keywords

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MATT LAUER, co-host:
Will we ever know how Chandra Levy died? Dr. Michael Baden is a forensic pathologist and author of "Dead Reckoning: The New Science of Catching Killers."

Dr. MICHAEL BADEN (Forensic Pathologist): Good morning, Matt.

LAUER: Put yourself in the position of the medical examiner in Washington, DC. You're given skeletal remains. What's the first thing you do in trying to determine not only how she died, in terms of whether it was an accident or homicide, but the cause of death?

Dr. BADEN: Well, firstly, they were able to identify who it was from the skeletal remains, and it sounds like they've got a lot of information from the skeletal remains, but they're hesitant to put a cause of death on it. If there is a skull fracture, that could be evidence of being hit with a rock or a blunt object.

LAUER: Why can't you tell, based on skeletal remains, if that skull fracture came before--if it caused death or came after death?

Dr. BADEN: Well, because usually we tell that from the soft tissues. We say that it's an injury before death because there is hemorrhage in the skin and tissues around the fracture. When there is no tissues on the skeletonized body, you can't do that. But still, there is enough there. I'm sure that cause of death will eventually be changed to either blunt object due to the skull fracture or strangulation, which is the more likely cause of death if there is a knotted clothing that could have been a ligature.

LAUER: All right. If they have, indeed, found leggings that were tied in a knot, though, without soft
tissue, can you determine strangulation?
Dr. BADEN: The FBI will be looking at that to determine if there is any of her hair in it. If she's got some of her hair, which stays and doesn't deteriorate as fast as soft tissues, that will be good evidence that it was wrapped around her neck and it got incorporated into the knot.
LAUER: When you--when you examine a crime scene, like the one in Rock Creek Park, what do you look for to determine whether she was killed in that park or whether she was killed somewhere else and placed in that park?
Dr. BADEN: The circumstances. First, Dr. Ardent did say that the time of death, that she died at the time she was missing. She wasn't--did--wasn't kept in a refrigerator and brought there after. Secondly, from--from what it looks like. This is an area that nobody carried a body around for--for hours or for a time when they could be seen in the daytime. So she died at that area, whether it's a few feet away or not. But I think what Chief Ramsey says, the most important thing is what Chief Ramsey says is the great majority of murders are solved by interviewing people, by shoe leather, and not by forensic science. This will be solved.
LAUER: Well, let's--let's make a point there. Tell me the difference. Most people think, `OK, why can't the medical examiner now solve this crime?' That's not the medical examiner's job.
Dr. BADEN: You're right. The medical examiner's job is to determine what happened. It's Chief Ramsey and the prosecutor and the crime lab to determine who done it.