



**ENGLAND** cricketer Ben Stokes walks during a lunch break at Bristol Crown Court where he is on trial accused of affray, in Bristol, England. Stokes, the world's most expensive cricket player, went on trial Monday over a fight outside a nightclub in which he is accused of knocking two men unconscious. (Ben Birchall/PA via AP)

# Trial: England cricket star Stokes knocked out men in the street

BRISTOL, England (AP) — Ben Stokes, one of the world's most expensive cricket players, knocked two men unconscious in a street brawl after flicking a cigarette end at gay men he mocked outside a nightclub, the prosecution said at the England star's trial on Monday.

The alleged assault, which happened in September after England played in the southwest English city of Bristol, has led to Stokes missing some of his country's biggest matches as he contests the affray charge.

Stokes appeared for the first day of the trial at Bristol Crown Court alongside former soldier Ryan Hale and emergency services worker Ryan Ali, friends who had not met the cricketer before that night.

Ali's eye socket was fractured by Stokes and Hale was also hospitalised with a cut to his forehead, prosecutor Nicholas Corsellis said in his opening statement.

"During the incident Mr Stokes lost his control and started to attack with revenge, retaliation

or punishment in mind. Well beyond acting in self-defense or defense of another," Corsellis said.

"He knocked Mr Hale unconscious and then — after time to pause for thought, to calm — he did exactly the same to Mr Ali."

Stokes had been partying with England teammates at the Mbargo nightclub after a one-day international against the West Indies.

Stokes left the club at 12:46am but the pair returned at 2:08am and was refused entry because

the club was closed. Stokes allegedly hurled insulting comments at the door supervisor.

Stokes then spoke to two men — Kai Barry and William O'Connor — who were described by the prosecutor as "flamboyant, extrovert and openly gay."

Security camera footage, which had no audio recording, showed Stokes flicking the end of a cigarette toward one of the men.

Citing testimony from the doorman, Corsellis said Stokes was "mimicking

their voices and mannerisms ... making fun of their camp behaviour" before leaving the area in an "angry state of mind."

Stokes then encountered Barry, O'Connor, Hale and Ali further down the road where the fighting began.

"We know Mr Ali had a bottle and he was using it. No one else was armed," Corsellis said.

"Mr Stokes became involved and punched out and grappled with Mr Ali on the ground."

Stokes was arrested at the scene and footage from

one of the police officers' body cameras captured him saying he intervened because a man was "abusing my two friends for being gay." Hale told officers that there was "banter but no malice."

Stokes, who as an all-rounder is good at both batting and bowling, was the most expensive overseas recruit in the annual player auction for the Indian Premier League.

The Rajasthan Royals paid \$1.95 million for Stokes to play in the six-week Twenty20 competition.

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