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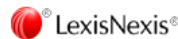
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Preexisting Condition to Blame for HS Football Player's Death (</high-school/heart-and-lung-failure-blamed-for-hs-football-player-s-death.html>)

by Chris Joyner October 2015

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Burke County Coroner Susan Salemi said high school officials did everything they could to save 17-year-old Rodrick "Rod" Williams when he collapsed on the practice field Sept. 22 in Waynesboro.

But a preexisting heart condition in Rod's young, but extra-large, body foiled their efforts, she said. Put simply, the 5-foot-, 11-inch, 300-pound junior offensive lineman's heart and lungs failed, she said.

"He had hypertensive heart disease and he went into pulmonary edema," Salemi said.

The team's athletic trainer performed CPR on Rod until an ambulance arrived. Classmates met and prayed, but Rod died Monday, almost two weeks after his collapse. A funeral service in the high school auditorium is scheduled for Saturday.

Rod is the fifth high school football player across the nation to die either in a game or during practice this season. He is the first in Georgia.

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Pulmonary edema is caused when fluid builds up in the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. In most cases, the attack is related to heart failure. That's what happened to Rod, the coroner said. No drugs were found in his system, she said.

Salemi said school officials did what they could to save the boy, including using the school's defibrillator on the field.

Salemi said the death is a "real eye-opener" for Rod's approximately 1,200 classmates at the high school 150 miles southeast of Atlanta. Adults are devastated too, she said, adding she called a friend who taught Rod in elementary school just to see if she was OK.

"She used to call him 'Big Rod,'" she said. "And that was in the 5th grade."

State law requires high school athletes to pass a physical which requires a medical professional to fill out an extensive checklist on each child. Blood pressure is one of the measures.

The Georgia High School Athletic Association closely regulates the training of high school athletes in an attempt to head off such disasters, including limiting how often and how long athletes can practice, particularly in the warmer months.

October 9, 2015

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