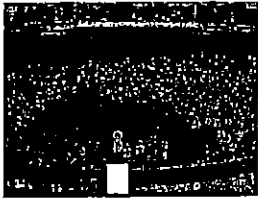


Hundreds honor fallen WL teen

Joseph Paul and Sam King, Journal & Courier Published 9:38 a.m. ET May 31, 2016 | Updated 3:26 p.m. ET June 1, 2016



(Photo: Eric Schieler/For the Journal & Courier)

Last Thursday, Christian Burns wore his trademark smile that just wouldn't go away, the product of reaching a lofty goal to bookend a grueling track season.

Burns had helped West Lafayette's 400 relay team qualify for the state finals.

"That's been our goal the whole season," Burns said. "We said we've got to make it to state and we did it."

On Tuesday night, an estimated crowd of 500 showed up at the West Lafayette athletic complex to remember Burns' contagious smile and the stubborn way he'd set goals and not quit until they were accomplished, just as he did with his junior year of track.

Burns, 17, was pronounced dead at the scene of an early Tuesday morning car crash in White County.

He was a passenger in a red 2013 Toyota traveling west on White County Road 700 South when, for an unknown reason, the vehicle left the south side of the road and rolled several times before striking a metal utility pole.

The crash occurred just after 1 a.m. near the intersection of County Road 450 West, according to a press release from the White County Sheriff's Office.



Christian Burns (second from right) and his teammates, Nate Merroitt, Jack Folkers and Darrell Afolahi of West Lafayette High School, earned a trip to the state finals with their run in the 4 x 100 relay during the 2016 ISHAA Boys Regional Track and Field Championships that took place at Jefferson High School on May 26th 2016. (Photo: Tom Baugues/For the Journal & Courier)

The driver, Benjamin Edwards, and two more passengers, Alexandra Deryn and Alexander Alge — all 17 years old and from West Lafayette — were transported to various hospitals for treatment.

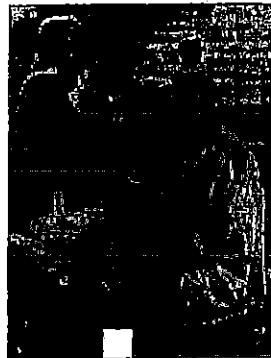
Deryn is in stable condition at IU Health Methodist Hospital, while Edwards and Alge were treated and released from St. Elizabeth East, according to hospital spokespersons.

The incident remains under investigation, the press release states.

Rocky Killion, superintendent of West Lafayette Community School Corp., confirmed in a written news release that all four teenagers were students at West Lafayette High School.

He said in an interview Tuesday that counselors were available for grieving students or staff. Anyone seeking those resources should call the high school at 765-746-0400, he said.

"It is a very sad day for our school community," Killion said in the written release. "Christian was a wonderful young man who was the epitome of courage, strength and kindness. He will be greatly missed by all, especially his friends and teammates."



West Lafayette students mourn the loss of Christian Burns. (Photo: Eric Schieler/For the Journal & Courier)

The community conducted a candlelight vigil on the front stretch of the track Tuesday night with the crowd spilling halfway out on the football field. Tears were shed, stories were told and laughs helped temporarily dull the pain.

In addition to his success as a sprinter for the track team, Burns was a running back for the football team and a former wrestler. Burns rushed for 544 yards and nine touchdowns as a running back for the Red Devils' Class 3A state runner-up team last fall and also recorded 32 tackles. He was expected to be one of the major contributors this upcoming season as a senior.

"He's going to be with us out on the field both with his jersey out on the field and spiritually," classmate Matt Marley said. "I know he'll be watching every game, so there's that much more incentive to play harder for him."