

West Lafayette teen killed in car crash



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PUBLISHED: 05/31/16 10:33 PM EDT.

UPDATED: 07/21/16 09:12 AM EDT.

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind.

West Lafayette High School students are mourning one of their own, remembering a young athlete killed in a crash.

Investigators say that crash happened around one a.m. on County Road 700 South in White County. Four classmates from West Lafayette High School were in the car when it went off the road, flipped several times, and hit a metal utility pole.

The driver and two passengers, all 17-year-olds, were taken to various hospitals.

Police say 17-year-old Christian Burns was killed instantly.

The cause of the crash is still under investigation.

On the track in West Lafayette, coaches say Burns stood out. He was the type of athlete who led by example - the very definition of teammate.

"He was just a natural leader," said WLHS track coach Lane Custer.

"He was like a real team player and in the true sense of the word, Christian comes to mind," said Burns' teammate Daniel Afolabi. "When we found out he qualified at the regional event, he came up to me and said, 'Oh, thank you so much for helping us make it to State'."

"After my races, he would come up and give me a high five or a hug and tell me good job and when it comes down to it, in times like these, you learn that those small gestures mean a lot more than being a good teammate and that's what he did," said teammate and WLHS Senior Dylan Williams, holding back tears.

Burns' friends are now struggling to understand a sudden tragedy.

Coach Custer got the phone call right after the crash.

"I was so concerned about all four kids in the car and then being friends with Christian's family personally, it's especially hard and then you have to make that call to other people and let them know and be there to comfort them when you're still trying to comfort yourself," Custer said.

Coach Custer describes Burns as an all-American kid: courageous and kind and competitive. He was a star on the track, but also the football field, where he often played wide receiver.

Burns had just finished his junior year. Just last weekend, he qualified for state finals with his 4x1 relay team.

"He was so happy and full of joy that day," Afolabi said. "It was amazing to witness."

"Outstanding student. He's academic all-state track and field, getting ready to break our school record Saturday at the state track meet with his three buddies," Custer added. "His family was putting off moving his sister to

Chicago by a week just so they could go watch him and his friends break our school record."

Grief wasn't supposed to be part of that achievement. But grief certainly took over practice for Burns' teammates on Tuesday. A few broke down in tears. Others offered hugs of support. They also gathered in prayer prior to practice.

On Saturday, they say this team still plans to race, thinking of their friend every step of the way.

"Going into the state meet now, I think we're all just gonna dedicate our races to him and all the others involved in the accident," said WLHS Senior Lauren Johnson.

"I think there's a lot to be learned from Christian Burns as a human being and he'll be remembered forever," Williams said, "and we're going to run really hard this weekend and dedicate it to him."

Funeral services planned

Visitation for Christian Burns will be held Monday (June 6) from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas Center in West Lafayette, with a Funeral Mass to follow.

Published 5/31/16, wthr.com, Channel 13, Indianapolis