

Standout St. Xavier football player mourned after fall from balcony

Football player died after falling from balcony while on Florida vacation

Staff report

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CINCINNATI — St. Xavier High School is mourning the loss of senior Matt James, a standout football player who died Friday, April 2, during a spring break trip to Panama City, Florida.

Cox Media Group partners WKRC-Local 12 reported over the weekend that the Panama City police department released details of the incident, which indicated the 17-year old James fell from a fifth-story balcony at a Days Inn hotel.

“It appears to be a tragic accident,” Panama City Beach police Maj. David Humphreys said Saturday. “Witnesses and friends indicate he had become drunk and belligerent. He had leaned over the balcony rail, was shaking his finger at the people in the next room over. He fell over.”

Humphreys said the railing at the hotel met the standards for proper height. He said police would be interested in pursuing charges if it was learned who provided the underage teen with alcohol.

The 6-foot-8, 290-pound offensive lineman signed a letter of intent on Feb. 2 to play football at the University of Notre Dame. James was an all-city and all-state football player for the St. Xavier Bombers. He anchored the offensive line and helped the team win its fourth consecutive Greater Catholic League South title this past season. James played in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl Jan. 9 in San Antonio, Texas. In addition to his football prowess, James was also member of the school’s varsity basketball team that recently finished the season as district champion.

James is the second St. Xavier student to die this school year, following the loss of junior Kevin Le in September. Le was struck Sept. 8 by a motorist who ran a red light in Fairfield. He survived in a coma for nine days before he died from his injuries Sept. 17

St. Xavier High School students, staff and parents began gathering on campus Friday evening to support one another upon hearing about James’ death. Several hundred of them joined in a circle at midfield of St. Xavier Stadium. Holding lit candles, teammates, classmates and admirers shared stories of their memories of James before praying together.

“It’s amazing how quickly the word spread and how quickly the community came together,” said Mark Motz, St. Xavier director of communications and publications in a statement. “Lyrics in our alma mater say ‘we are Xavier men forever,’ and I think this gathering showed how much these guys take that to heart. For this many people to appear on the first night of spring break is a testament both to Matt and to the strength of the St. X community in difficult times.”

Jerry and Peggy James, Matt’s parents, issued a statement on Saturday thanking everyone “for their prayers and support during this tragic time.”

“We are touched by this outpouring of love,” the statement continued. “While our entire family appreciates this interest and support, please allow us some private time to grieve and make preparations.”

No funeral arrangements had been announced as of Monday morning.

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