

High school football player died during practice - What we know so far

By Sam Zeff
Kansas News Service/ KCUR

The 17-year-old student who died on the first day of practice at Pawnee Heights High School, Tuesday, is the fifth football player to die in Kansas since 2018. An autopsy was scheduled for Thursday to determine how a high school football player from a tiny school in western Kansas died on the first day of practice. The teen died around 9 p.m. Tuesday, according to Pawnee County Attorney Doug McNett. “I did not know the young man personally, but know his parents,” McNett said in a statement to the Great Bend Tribune. “They are very active in the community and my heart



The family of Rylan Reece, 17, who died Tuesday during football practice at Pawnee Heights High School in western Kansas. COURTESY PHOTO/MEAL TRAIN

breaks for them.” In a phone interview, McNett identified the student as 17-year-old Rylan Reece, a junior. McNett said Rylan’s mother volunteers in the school district and his father is a former Pawnee County under-sheriff. McNett said the

humidity in Great Bend, according to the National Weather Service. It is unclear whether the weather played a role in the teen’s death. An autopsy was originally scheduled in Garden City but was moved to Wichita. McNett said he ordered the autopsy after Rylan’s family agreed. The high school is in Rozel, Kansas, about 40 miles southwest of Great Bend. The Pawnee Heights School District has two schools and about 140 students. The high school plays six-man football and last year had 17 players on its roster.

FARM

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drip irrigation system” fed by a pond of water, and powered by solar panels. The system includes filtration systems, cooling systems, underground tubes, and a pontoon boat. The local operation has received quite the buzz recently, and on Thursday, Elnickie showed visitors from northern Argentina around and explained the details of the irrigation system. Elnicki and representatives of NutraDrip Irrigation Systems noted that the visitors from Argentina use a subsurface drip irrigation system for their crops, which include wheat, soybeans, and corn. During The Morning Sun’s initial visit in 2024, Elnicki was installing the irrigation system and getting ready for corn season. Today, the field produces soybeans with an average yield of 50 bushels per acre. The operation is a family effort with Elnicki owning controlling everything west of the roadway on the property and his son, Brice, controlling the east side that features the pond. The type of irrigation system itself is fairly new to the area. Elnicki noted that he is aware of only one other person in the local area that offers the same type of system, which is Rick Jesse over near Crestline in Cherokee

County, who inspired Elnicki to pursue that type of farming. “It’s really growing,” he said. “Rick Jesse at Crestline, he’s got a big farm operation over there at Crestline ... He was the first one in the area that put in the subsurface drip irrigation, and he was a customer of mine because we ran Kamo Grain for 26 years. So when he installed it, I said ‘Hey, I’m interested in doing that on this farm because we have the water’ ... There’s a lot over there (Missouri).”

HOW IT WORKS Subsurface drip irrigation, also referred to as SDI, is a type of micro irrigation in which water is applied to the crop’s root zone below the soil surface, minimizing evaporation and ultimately providing a new era for water conservation. The method significantly saves water and increases yields by eliminating surface water evaporation and minimizing weed and disease infestations. “You don’t have near the evaporations,” said Elnicki. “The water goes underground to the root system. A normal irrigation, what they call center pivot, sprays out on top ... So, you’re getting a lot of evaporation whereas with this system, it goes underground to the roots zone, and you have very little evaporation because the surface stays dry,

generally.” As part of the process, the pond feeds the water through a tube placed on top of a pontoon boat. The water goes through the tube into a trailer where it is filtered before making its way into the drip tape, a plastic tube with built-in water emitters. “The water goes through the sand filters and then goes out the pipe and it’s all underground,” said Elnicki. “There’s six zones so we can monitor each of the six zones as far as how much moisture there is. There are moisture sensors out there in the field ... We can usually run about 12 hours ... They (the drip tapes) are buried five feet apart.” Daniel Zywiets, SEK Solar co-founder, covered the solar panels used to power the project, which includes solar panels on one side of the battery trailer and the other side of the filter trailer. “Well, in irrigation, it’s slightly different because you have a pump size and you want to double your pump size so you can double at noon, then one at 6 p.m.,” he said. “So the trick here was to come up with something that produces better flat and the solution to that is to have half of the panels facing east and the other half are facing west. So when you put them together, it starts relatively early in the morning. “Then it produces a

relatively stable power output and at some point, it quits ... That allows us to start a little bit earlier in the morning or keep running after dark ... The total output here, we have 72 kilowatts of panels and then in the summer we’ll use close to 500 kilowatt hours a day.” Elnicki noted that the panels power the irrigation system for around 12 hours throughout the day. But it’s been a hot year. The crew has pumped more water into the fields this summer than the previous ones, needing around 13 million more gallons across the 113-acre field for soybeans. “We’ve been pumping it every day for about three weeks, and we’ve been able to keep up pretty well,” said Elnicki. “If we happen to get a good rain we can shut them off for a while ... This year, I started out at 11 (million gallons) so we’ve put on 13 million gallons of water on this field. That’s the equivalent of about four inches. It sounds like a lot but on 113 acres that’s only four inches but that four inches is down there where it does the most good.”

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MEMORIAL

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showcasing events that were equitably accessible for youth. To do this, she obtains grants and strives to book acts that are available during the day and perform shows for schools. “We invite all the schools, and you know, to start with the younger audiences, so that they develop a passion for the arts and culture,” she said. Upcoming shows presented by Memorial Auditorium are: Blank Space: The Unofficial Taylor Swift Tribute – Sept. 12. For this concert, Olivia Moretti embodies Taylor Swift and recreates her tour with dancers, costumes and musicians. 1,2,3 Andres – Sept. 17. This children’s concert is in conjunction with the Hispanic Music Festival. The group features Latin Grammy-winning and Grammy-winning musicians, who also have a show on PBS. They have also written several children’s books. Texas Shakespeare Festival Road Show: “Twelfth Night”- Oct. 30 12:30 p.m. This traveling thespian group will work with local high school students with workshops, then hold a performance of “Twelfth Night” in the afternoon. Family Movie Day: “The Grinch” (2018) - Dec. 20 at 2 p.m. Families can enjoy a movie with fun treats, a book giveaway, and more. International Ballet Stars: “Swan Lake” – March 30, 2027. After the success of “The Nutcracker” in 2025, International Ballet Stars is returning for a production of “Swan Lake.” The production will be looking for dancers ages 3 to 18 to learn dances for the show. Jest Murder Mystery

Co.: Bullets in the Bath-tub! - April 23, 2027. This murder mystery evening is part comedy and part mystery with a 1920s storyline. Guests become part of the investigation as they work to solve the mystery. Young Artist Showcase & Awards - June 17, 2027. This event will showcase the talented youth in the area. Shultz said it was important to invite youth and welcome them into the space since sometimes there are preconceived notions regarding performance theaters. After presenting one of the kids’ science shows, Shultz said she received letters thanking her and saying that their students had never seen anything like that before. “I get pretty emotional talking about educational outreach,” she said. Another thing is, that building is 100 years old, and you have to develop those generations that are going to take care of it. You can’t just expect that when they get older that they’re going to understand this space or automatically know about it. They have to be welcomed into the space, and so that’s what we’re trying to do is create that love of the arts, love of the building, and give that exposure to culture.” Shultz said the community has been supportive, and she’s looking forward to the upcoming season. “We hope you come out to all the shows and support this new mission and vision of being a true community hub,” she said. For more information about Memorial Auditorium, call 620-231-7827.

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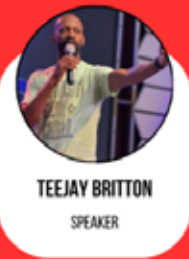
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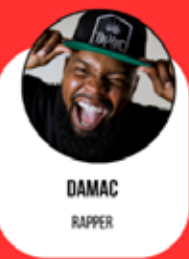
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