Phila. hoops standout dies at 21

Danny Rumph, a former star at Parkway, collapsed after hitting the winning shot in a pickup game.

By Marc Narducci
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The Philadelphia basketball community was stunned and saddened by the loss of one of its most popular members, Danny Rumph.

Rumph, a 21-year-old point guard from Parkway High School who just completed his junior year at Western Kentucky, died Sunday night. He collapsed after a pickup basketball game at a city recreation center.

According to investigators in Philadelphia, Rumph was pronounced dead at 11:45 p.m. at Albert Einstein Medical Center. An autopsy was being conducted to determine the cause of death.

Rumph's uncle Marcus Owens said there had been no history of medical problems with his nephew.

"He was healthy and always loved playing basketball," said Owens, standing outside the Rumph home in Mount Airy, where visitors flocked to offer their condolences throughout the day.

According to Owens, Rumph played basketball twice on Sunday. In the morning, Owens was among a group that played a game with him at the Mallery Recreation Center at Morton and Johnson Streets, a few blocks from the Rumphs' home.

In the evening, Rumph returned to the recreation center. About 10:45 p.m., shortly after the second game ended, Rumph collapsed.

Owens, who wasn't at the evening game, heard about what occurred from many who were there.

"He hit the game-winning shot and was walking off the court when he began speaking funny," Owens said. "Then he collapsed."

The son of Daniel Rumph and Viola Owens, Danny started 29 of 31 games this season for Western Kentucky. He averaged 9.1 points in 28.2 minutes and was known as a defensive specialist.

"I still can't believe this happened to my one and only son," Daniel Rumph said yesterday while sitting outside his home.

His son will be remembered as much for his affable nature as his basketball ability.

"He was a great young man who came from a great family," said La Salle University assistant coach Horace Owens, who coached Rumph for many years in AAU ball and the Sonny Hill League. "He is the kind of guy you wanted your daughter to marry."

(Horace Owens is no relation to Rumph.)

Western Kentucky coach Darrin Horn was unavailable for comment yesterday, but he issued a statement.

"We are shocked and saddened by the tragic news we received this morning," Horn said. "Danny was loved and respected by not only everyone in the basketball program, but by many people in the Western community. Our thoughts and prayers are with Danny's family."

Rumph made the same impression on people from his hometown.

"Danny was the ultimate team player," said Rodney Handy, an assistant coach at Roman Catholic who coached Rumph in the Sonny Hill League. "He just loved the game of basketball and put everything he had into it."

Marcus Owens, who was wearing a shirt with a picture of Danny in his Western Kentucky uniform, said that funeral arrangements were pending until the autopsy findings are released. He said the family hoped to have the results by tomorrow or Thursday.

The 6-foot-2, 180-pound Rumph played two seasons for Parkway, averaging 22.1 points during his senior season in 2000-01. He then attended Maine Central Institute, a preparatory school, where he averaged 18 points and seven assists.

At Western Kentucky, his statistics improved each season. He was honored as the team's most improved player at a banquet April 14.

"He loved Western Kentucky," his father said. "He was so much looking forward to graduating and his senior year."

Danny Rumph came from a basketball family. His father played at Hofstra, and his uncle Randy Owens was a standout center-forward at Philadelphia Textile (now Philadelphia University) who was drafted by the Indiana Pacers in 1980.

Now, his family is left only with the memories, of which there are many to cherish.

"He was outgoing and friendly with everybody and always tried to do the positive thing," his father said. "We're very proud of all that he has accomplished."