

Former Trojan basketball player charged with murder

By TED SULLIVAN
Bozeman, Mont., Daily Chronicle
Staff Writer

Two former Montana State University athletes were arrested and charged with deliberate homicide Thursday for their roles in the apparent drug-related slaying last week of Jason Wright.

Former MSU basketball player Branden Miller, 22, and former MSU football player John Lebrum, 22, face charges in the June 23 shooting death of Wright, who was found dead in a field off Huffine Lane west of Bozeman.

Miller last played at Colby Community College during the 2003-2004 season.

Both men are accused of kidnapping Wright, 26, and later destroying evidence of the homicide and disposing of Wright's black Chevrolet Tahoe in Belgrade.

Miller is being held in Gallatin County's jail on \$1 million bail.

Lebrum has not had his initial appearance in court.

"The investigation is ongoing and additional people may be charged," Gallatin County Attorney

Marty Lambert said Thursday.

Miller told investigators that Lebrum, known as "Freak," called him early that Friday morning and wanted a ride to Perkins Restaurant on Bozeman's West Main Street, where Wright, who police say was a suspected cocaine dealer, was dining.

According to court records, investigators say the details of the crime are as follows:

Miller and Lebrum parked near Perkins and waited for Wright to come outside. When Wright left the restaurant, Lebrum ran toward him, hit him on the head, and loaded him into the back seat of Wright's Tahoe. Lebrum then drove the Tahoe west on Huffine Lane.

Miller told investigators he drove away in his own car in the other direction, eventually going to an apartment he shares with former MSU basketball player Ja' Ron



B. Miller

Jefferson.

At about 3 a.m. a witness was driving on Huffine Lane west of Bozeman and turned onto Ferguson Avenue.

The witness saw a maroon GMC Envoy parked in the middle of the southbound lane on Ferguson between the entrance to Casey's Corner and Fallon Avenue.

Approaching the Envoy, the witness saw Wright running away from the vehicle. Wright appeared to be scared and in a hurry.

Wright attempted to flag down the witness and even lunged at the vehicle in an attempt to stop it. The witness kept driving.

The Envoy belongs to former MSU basketball player Aaron Rich. Tire tracks from Rich's Envoy later were matched to tire tracks found near Wright's body.

Thirty minutes later, a man who lives on Love Lane told investigators he heard five gunshots near his home. He then heard a vehicle speed away, its tires spinning.

About 10 hours later, Wright's body was found. He had been shot and beaten. Investigators found several .40-caliber shell casings

near his body.

On Sunday, investigators learned more details about Wright, a former American Legion baseball player and coach in Livingston and Bozeman and a 1998 graduate of Park High School. He had been a cocaine dealer, police say.

They searched his apartment in the 500 block of Michael Grove Avenue and found "pays and owes" sheets related to drug dealing. A handgun Wright owned was missing.

On Monday, Lebrum called Miller, asked him to get a bottle of bleach and meet him. The two then went to the Hilton Garden Inn where Wright's Tahoe was parked.

The back window was broken and the interior was covered in blood. Miller and Lebrum wiped down the car with bleach and Miller took Wright's laptop computer. The two then abandoned the car near the intersection of Dakota Street and Rosebud Avenue in Belgrade.

On Tuesday, the Tahoe was found outside a business in Belgrade. Dried blood was found on the exterior and interior of the vehicle. A

small bag of cocaine and an empty can of bleach were found near the Tahoe.

Also on Tuesday, investigators received a tip that Wright's computer had been found in a Dumpster at MSU. When detectives searched the Dumpster, they also found documents with Wright's name on them along with a birthday card and receipt belonging to Miller, who later admitted throwing the items in the Dumpster.

Another witness, former MSU basketball player and assistant coach James Clark, told investigators Miller had several handguns and Wright's identification card. Clark was related to Wright through marriage before Wright divorced.

The handguns later were found in a locker at MSU's Brick Breeden Fieldhouse.

The locker containing the guns was labeled "1 Wilson." Jacques Wilson, a current member of the MSU basketball team, wears jersey No. 1.

One of the handguns found in the locker was the same caliber as the shell casings found near Wright's body, Sheriff Jim Cashell said

Thursday during a press conference.

In the courtroom with about 20 people looking on Thursday, Miller, wearing orange jailhouse coveralls, spoke softly.

He appeared on video from the nearby jail. He told the judge he understood the charges against him. He said he had read his rights. And he didn't have any questions for the judge.

Gallatin County Attorney Marty Lambert asked the judge for \$1 million bail, saying Miller helped "ambush" Wright, leading to his death. He also said Miller must remain in jail to protect witnesses with information on the homicide.

Judge Scott Wyckman set bail at \$1 million. Hours after Miller appeared in court, authorities arrested Lebrum, who was expected to appear in court on Friday. If convicted, Lebrum and Miller could be sentenced to death. They also face \$50,000 fines.

They will enter pleas to the charges in court at a future date.

Colby Free Press contributed to this story.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

To have your ad placed in the
Business Directory
call Crystal or Jasmine today at 462-3963.

LET ADVERTISING WORK FOR YOU!!!

What's yours is theirs...or is it?

Without a proper estate protection strategy, your loved ones may not receive all you've worked so hard to achieve. Thrivent Financial for Lutherans can help ensure your assets pass according to your plan. Call today.



James (Jim) Jordan
Regional Support Associate
Member-Million Dollar Round Table
Member-NAIFA
Member-NAFIC
800-756-2139

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans®

Neither Thrivent Financial for Lutherans nor its respective associates provide legal or tax advice. For complete details, consult with your tax advisor or attorney.

21384B RS-03 200301466 ©2006 Thrivent Financial for Lutherans

JOHN'S WELDING

- Welding & Repair
- Field Service
- Miscellaneous Repairs

Brewster, KS
785-694-3553

leave message

Northwest Refrigeration
Heat and Air Inc.
THE SUMMER HEAT IS ON
24 HOUR SERVICE
"We install the best...service the rest"
785-460-3008
CALL TODAY FOR ALL YOUR AIR-CONDITIONING AND REFRIGERATION NEEDS!

New Beginnings Counseling Services

Douglas Finley, LMSW

Specializing in:
Children,
Adolescent,
Individual,
Marital and
Family
Counseling

422 Smith Drive
Colby, KS 67701

785-462-3308

Toll Free: 866-608-9723

Evening Appointments

Check out our low rates.
Call today for your free, no-obligation quote.
David L. Browne III
550 N Franklin Ave
Colby
(785) 462-3388
FARM BUREAU FINANCIAL SERVICES
Auto Home Life Annuities College Retirement
www.fbfs.com

Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company/West Des Moines, IA, Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company/West Des Moines, IA, Companies of Farm Bureau Financial Services © 2006 FBL Financial Group, Inc. 419

H & H AUTO SALES
JEFF HARLOW
Hours:
M-F 9-5:30;
Sat 9-4:30
Phone: 785-460-0828
930 S. Range Colby, Kansas 67701
Fax: 785-460-0829
Cell: 785-443-1082

Advanced Technology Auto Glass
"The Difference is Clear"
Rory Henry • 785-460-7773

Thomas County Insurance has been serving NW Kansas for 100 years.
Stop in and experience the friendly service and excellent insurance products we have to offer.
490 N. Franklin • 462-3939
THOMAS COUNTY INSURANCE AGENCY
Jim McLaughlin/Agent

FAMILY DENTAL CARE
The Latest Technology and Most Complete Care Available!
• Root Canals • Orthodontics
• Implants • Wisdom Tooth Surgery
New Patients Welcome
No Referral Necessary ~ Financing Avail.
1690 W. 4th St., Colby ~ 785-460-3999
Toll Free: 1-866-305-3999
SHAWN D. JENSEN, D.D.S.

Hopper 4 Life
Looking to buy used Grasshoppers?
Looking to sell a used Grasshopper?
Go to
<http://www.brownandtannedzeroturnmowers.com>
Or contact
kay67107@yahoo.com

G&S TREE WORKS LLC
1114 Main, Gem (785) 462-3501
Chuck Saddler Tracey Galli
• Tree Removal & Trimming • Full Insured • Careful & Prompt Service • Late Model Bucket Truck • Free Estimates!

ROOFMASTERS
Your Local Roofing Contractor
425 East Hill, Colby, KS
Licensed - Bonded - Insured
RESIDENTIAL 1-800-536-6642
Tamko Shingles
GAF Shingles 1-785-462-6642
Wood Shingles
Metal Roofs
FREE ESTIMATES
Elastomeric Rubber Coating For Metal Roofs
COMMERCIAL
Rubber Single Ply
White TPO Single Ply
Built Up Systems
Modified Systems

WORLDWIDE • Vacation Packages • Cruises • Tours • Groups • Flights • Hotels • Trains • Cars
155 W. 4th, Colby, KS 67701
Phone: 785-462-6999
Fax: 785-460-0852
Toll Free: 1-888-690-7077
CALL IN OR FAX YOUR INTERNET QUOTES AND OTHER ADS! WE CAN BOOK THEM FOR YOU WITH LOCAL, CARING SERVICE!!
VACATION SPECIALS
LAS VEGAS Air & Hotel \$250
DISNEY WORLD Park Passes, Air & Hotel \$505
MEXICO Air & Hotel \$800
CARIBBEAN CRUISE Cruise & Air \$1,050
ALASKAN CRUISE Cruise & Air \$740
HAWAII Air & Hotel \$700
LONDON, ENGLAND Air & Hotel \$359
AMTRAK EXPLORE AMERICA
Round Trip Travel
BOOK SUMMER VACATIONS NOW!
Call for Bus Tours Schedules.
All specials may be for specific dates and are subject to availability

Colby Sew & Vac
Sales & Service
Southwind Plaza
785-460-1900
Hours: 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
• Viking & Bernina Sewing Machines • Vacuums • Fabrics
• Classes • Nature's Air - Air Purifiers
host Dry Carpet Cleaning System

Now Scheduling Spring Cleaning!
Commercial • Residential
Serving NW Kansas & Eastern Colorado!
New System
Professional Window Cleaning
Chris & Beth Lewon • 650 N. Grant • Colby, KS
785-462-6995 ~ 800-611-6735
Call for your FREE estimate!
"We do windows!"

Bison
Rx compounding & Therapy
Customized prescriptions for patients with unique medical situations requiring unique medical solutions.
James E. Hampton, RPh, PCCA Member
416 State Street, Suite A
Atwood, Kansas 67730
(785) 626-3237
(800) 696-3214
Bison Rxcompounding@atwoodtv.net

Murray Roofing & Construction
Residential & Commercial
(785) 462-6908
Residential roofs
Flat & Low-Sloped Roofs
Metal Retro-Fit
Energy Efficient Roofing Solutions
Vinyl & Steel Siding
Decks & Patios
Wood & Vinyl Fencing
Soffit & Fascia
FREE ESTIMATES
Jeff Dreiling - Sales
(785) 443-0819
FREE ESTIMATES
Jim Murray - Owner
(785) 443-1339