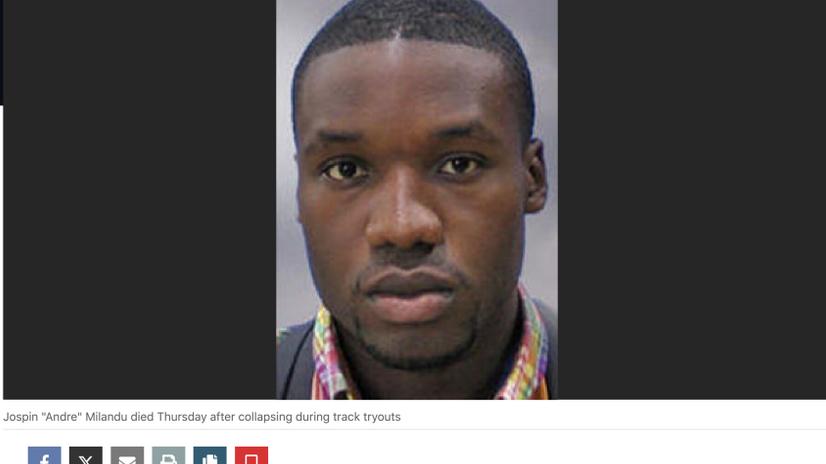




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Another fired over sickle cell death

By Gerald Witt Staff Writer Jan 18, 2011 Updated Jan 24, 2015 0



Jospin "Andre" Milandu died Thursday after collapsing during track tryouts



By Gerald Witt Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — N.C. A&T on Tuesday fired Associate Athletics Director Merlene Aitken and suspended chief athletics trainer Roland Lovelace with pay in more fallout from the investigation into the death of student Jospin "Andre"

Milandu at a track and field tryout in August.

University officials also confirmed that A&T is negotiating a financial settlement with the family of Milandu , who died of sickle cell trait.

The personnel moves come after the discovery this month of an Aug. 17 e-mail from Lovelace in which he asked coaches not to test tryouts for sickle cell trait to save money. The e-mail was sent two days before Milandu died. An NCAA rule requires sickle cell trait testing.

Aitken was copied on the e-mail but university officials did not find it in an initial investigation into Milandu's Aug. 19 death.

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"At no point did anyone reveal knowledge of the existence of the e-mail," Nicole Pride , associate vice chancellor for university relations, wrote in a response to questions from the News & Record.

Interim Athletics Director Earl Hilton III said by phone Tuesday that Aitken's "discontinuation of employment was effective as of this afternoon."

A&T did not release any other details of Aitken's firing or Lovelace's suspension.

Aitken's firing leaves a key role open in the athletics department. After its first investigation into Milandu's death, the school fired Athletics Director Wheeler Brown and Darryl Hills, NCAA compliance director, in October.

After Hills left, Aitken took over the duties of NCAA compliance in addition to her job as a liaison for students in the athletics department.

"I know that we'll be in conversation with HR (human resources), to be expeditious and ethical," Hilton said about filling Aitken's position. "We've got to have (NCAA) compliance in place right now."

Meanwhile, Pride said that A&T is working with the Milandu family on a possible settlement.

But the family could still sue, said Frank Johns , the family's attorney.

"I'm not hopeful that some resolution without litigation can occur with the university," he said Tuesday . He said there could be a civil lawsuit charging negligence.

"There are other options against individuals that we would carefully weigh and consider in filing broader-based action," Johns said.

Johns said A&T officials visited the family after

Milandu's death and asked them to agree to a \$10,000 settlement in an accidental death of their son.

"It seems that A&T State University is one of the universities in the system that is not participating as a good community citizen," Johns said.

"And its (A&T's) effort in defense of its position will be to defend at every turn," he said. "And the truth is that it's defenseless."

Pride said that the \$10,000 is in an accidental death insurance policy covering each student.

Johns said the family didn't take the policy.

"It wasn't an accident," he said.

On Aug. 17, Lovelace sent the e-mail about the sickle cell trait test to nine coaches and Aitken .

When asked, school officials offered little other information about why it took months for the Aug. 17 e-mail to surface. The e-mail was confirmed through a Jan. 6 public records request from the News & Record.

The school also provided Tuesday a copy of an e-mail from Benicia Cleveland , director of sports medicine at the time, that she sent in June to tell coaches about an upcoming NCAA rule change requiring tests for sickle cell trait .

Cleveland is now an assistant athletics trainer at Winston-Salem State University.

Some coaches who received the Aug. 17 e-mail from Lovelace also received Cleveland's earlier e-mail.

"Based on the June 10 e-mail, the athletics department should have known," Pride wrote.

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