

Bladenboro football star found hanged

BY MATTHEW JONES
STAFF WRITER

Bladenboro police Chief Chris Hunt walked Claudia Lacy from her house to a nearby trailer park. Crime scene tape surrounded one of the wooden swing sets at the center of the homes.

An ambulance was parked next to the swing set. Inside the ambulance, a black body bag rested. Inside that body bag lay her son, Lennon Lacy, 17, found hanged from the swing set.

A trailer park resident discovered the body hanging from a noose of black and blue belts at 7:25 a.m. on Aug. 29. The discovery of the star football player's body immediately sent shockwaves through the town and ignited a firestorm of controversy over race relations.

Jamie Walker, a sports blogger in Atlanta and former football player for Bladenboro High School, knows the sense of community people there feel.

"It's the type of town where everyone knows your name and everything that you do," said Walker in an email interview with The Guilfordian. "It has a lot of good people and they love their sports."

If the people of Bladenboro love their sports, then Lacy was infatuated with them. The varsity football player spent his free time training and dreaming of playing in the NFL.

"He was very serious about being a professional, very passionate about it," said his brother, Pierre Lacy, in an interview with The Guardian. "He never changed his mind or wavered from the course."

On the night of Aug. 28, Lacy was preparing for a big game the next day against the West Columbus Vikings. At about midnight, his father, Larry Walton, saw him leave his room where he was packing for school to get a glass of water. Later, Walton heard the door open and shut.

That was the last time anyone has admitted to seeing Lacy alive.

Some members of the community feel that investigators have failed to answer the many questions surrounding his death. People in Bladenboro and across North Carolina now wonder if race had anything to do with Lacy's death.

"Our greatest prayer is that this was not a lynching," said Rev. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP, at a memorial service for Lacy. "But we must rely on law enforcement and hope they don't give a predetermined answer. We expect a full investigation that gives us the truth."

An autopsy report released Oct. 15 echoed investigators' claims that there was no evidence of foul play. In conversations with the family and others, investigators have insinuated that the recent death of Lacy's close uncle might have driven him to suicide.

Family members do not think that Lacy took his own life.

"I know my son," Claudia Lacy told The Guardian. "The second I saw him I knew he could not have done that to himself — it would have taken at least two men to do that to him."

Family members pointed out that the swing set, in plain view of about a dozen trailers, would have been an unlikely choice for a suicide.

Both the undertaker and Claudia told the Guardian that marks on Lacy's body struck them both as high unusual. They also said that someone switched Lacy's new Air Jordans for white sneakers that were too small for him.

Many in the community wonder if someone killed Lacy because of his race. A few have suggested that he was murdered for dating an older white neighbor. Some saw this scenario as



Lennon Lacy, 17, was hanged from the swing set above by a noose.

more likely after Lacy's body was desecrated.

Race relations have simmered in Bladenboro for years. Some in the black community there call the town "Crackertown" because of its large white population.

"Something significant always stuck out when we practiced ... the backdrop of a Confederate flag, high on a flagpole behind the school property in someone's yard," wrote Walker in a column in which he remembered his time playing football in Bladenboro.

"I came to understand the historical significance of the flag, but for me as an African-American, it served as a reminder (that) despite how great your new start may be, there is someone that may not agree."

The hanging death of Lacy has jarred many black athletes' memories of racism they have encountered.

Walker remembers playing middle school baseball in a nearby town and facing a team from Bladenboro.

"While I was batting, their coach told their pitcher to 'throw it past their eyes, throw it past all them n--- eyes'," Walker said in an email interview.

"All I could do is sit back, shake my head and stay focused, but it just went to show you just how hateful people could be."

The issue of racism in sports extends far beyond Bladen County.

Guilford sophomore and Quakers defensive back Karl Roberts remembers an away game his high school football team in Charlotte played a few days before Halloween in 2010. The previous year, the attendance zones changed so that his school became predominantly black while many white students moved to the opposing school.

"When we went up there, their fans came dressed in monkey suits," said Roberts. "They had banana peels that they left in the stadium. Their excuse was that it was Halloween and it was their costume."

Whether or not racism contributed to Lacy's death, it does serve as a reminder that the specter of racism continues to haunt North Carolina, both on and off the sports field.

"I think it's still a big deal," said Roberts. "People kind of overlook it because they think racism isn't a big deal anymore, but it still is."

View from the trenches: rebounding

BY REESE SETZER
STAFF WRITER

A great football team has to be able to respond to adversity.

After suffering a disappointing 47-31 loss to Shenandoah University on Oct. 11, the Guilford College football team was struck with a new test this season: to get back on the path to greatness by grabbing victory over Bridgewater College.

We passed the test.

In the end we were victorious over Bridgewater 35-28, but not without getting tested from the kickoff to the final whistle.

To set the stage, entering the fourth quarter things were all tied up at 21-21.

We began the quarter with possession of the ball and got things started by driving down the field 72 yards and scoring a touchdown.

Leading 28-21, our stingy defense went out and forced a three and out.

With the ball back in our hands, the offense went on its longest drive of the season, a 16 play, eight-minute drive that ended in a smash-mouth rushing touchdown by running back Josh Schow from the goal line.

For an offensive lineman like me, there is nothing better than knowing you are not going to be denied getting your teammate into the end zone.

On that final drive, all five offensive linemen had that feeling, and it showed. We were in unison, blocking to protect and blocking to destroy.

Now up 35-21 in the dying embers of this firestorm of football, we believed we had done what was necessary to seal a victory.

Bridgewater received the ball with around four minutes left and was able to quickly score a touchdown.

With the score now 35-28, Bridgewater knew the only way to get the game tied up was to kick an onside kick, one of the most exciting and hectic plays in sports.

Their kicker was able to boot the ball 10 yards, and an unfortunate bounce led to a Bridgewater recovery.

Despite this, everyone on our sideline had confidence that our defense would make a fierce stand and stop our opponent.

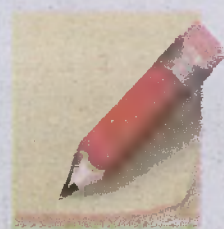
Once again, our trust was well placed in our defensive teammates.

They made a stop on fourth and two, inside of the 5 yard line, and gave the ball back to our offense. We took two victory kneels and sealed the victory.

The team was ecstatic to rebound and get back to our winning ways. Both defense and offense rushed out to celebrate a victory on the field, embracing each other in a brotherhood that was strengthened through this tough contest against a valiant opponent.

We know that we need that type of effort each and every week for the next month to accomplish our goal of winning an ODAC Championship.

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