

Death takes basketball star at VCU

Former Chowan Brave and Virginia Commonwealth University basketball player Michael Brown died of a rare condition in which the heart becomes enlarged and subject to an abnormal beat, according to a state medical examiner's report released January 5.

Brown, 24, a senior forward from Portsmouth, Va., collapsed during practice on January 2.

The medical examiner's report said tests for illegal drugs were negative. The cause of death was listed as "idopathic hypertrophic cardiomyopathy," a developmental abnormality of the heart. The cause of the condition is not known.

Dr. Joseph Ornato, professor of internal medicine and cardiology at the Medical College of Virginia, said that Brown's heart condition was a "variation of a rare condition, and that makes it even more rare."

He said tests can be conducted to detect the condition if a person exhibits certain symptoms, including chest tightness and shortness of breath. Brown never exhibited such symptoms, and the condition cannot be detected in the course of a routine physical, Ornato said.

"Unfortunately, it's quite common for the condition to show up with no previous warning, just as it did in Michael Brown's case," Ornato said.

Coach Mike Pollio had said he would have been surprised if drugs had played a role in Brown's health. Pollio said that he felt relief after hearing the medical examiner's report.

"I'd be lying if I told you it didn't matter," Pollio said. "But this is still very much a tragedy for all of us."

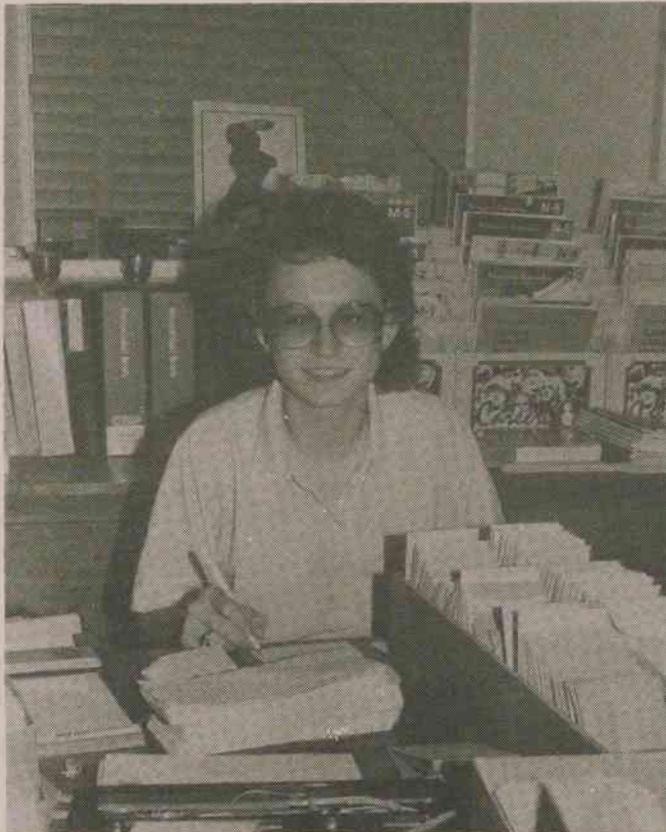
Brown was buried January 7 after a noon funeral service at the St. Mark Church of Deliverance in Portsmouth.

In 35 games with the VCU Rams last season, Brown, a transfer from Chowan College, averaged 1.2 points and 1.4 rebounds a game.

This season, he played in two games after overcoming early season injuries to his back and hand. He had no history of heart problems, said VCU sports information director Mike Ballweg.

Playing in the Richmond Times-Dispatch Invitational tournament in late December, Brown scored a total of 11 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in VCU's contests against James Madison and Virginia Tech.

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Dawn Tyler is a Chowan College student from Ahoskie, N. C. In addition to her studies and campus activities, Dawn also works parttime in the Office of Counseling and Career Development.

Dawn is one of 455 Chowan students who work up to 20 hours per week to help pay for their college education. Without this financial aid, many of these students would not be able to remain in college.

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