

Funeral Saturday at Mount St. Michael For Freshman Who Died After Collapse At Football Practice

By CHRISTIE L. CHICOINE

Dominick Bess, an incoming freshman at Mount St. Michael Academy in the Bronx, died Aug. 22 at a Bronx hospital after collapsing during his first day of football practice at the school.

The 14-year-old had participated in a non-contact team practice that morning as a member of the junior varsity, according to the school, and was treated immediately by CPR-certified staff on site and transported by paramedics to Montefiore Hospital Wakefield campus, where he later died.

An athlete and scholar, Dominick had an academic scholarship at the Mount, where he was to start classes in September. He was a graduate of Kappa III Middle School, a charter school in the Bronx.

"Obviously, we are all very saddened by his passing," Brother Steve Schlitte, F.M.S., principal at Mount St. Michael, said in a phone interview with CNY Aug. 28. "We were anticipating a great career for him here at the Mount. He was a very smart boy. He was coming in on an academic scholarship, and we were all looking forward to having him as a student."

"It's just very sad, and it's tragic in so many ways, but the outpouring of support from Catholic schools, from public schools, from neighbors, has been incredible," the principal added. "It's amazing how one young life can touch so many people."

"The archdiocese has been incredibly supportive with every kind of resource that we could possibly need in dealing with a tragedy of this sort," Brother Schlitte said.

The funeral for Dominick, who was not Catholic, is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 2, at 10 a.m. at Mount St. Michael, at the family's request. The service will be held at the Richard J. Tricario Sports Center, 4300 Murdock Ave. A viewing will be held

Friday, Sept. 1, from 4 to 9 p.m. at the same location.

The principal said he is honored the family wanted to have the services at the school. "They were excited to have him come to school here, and I think it's appropriate that we could do this for them," he said.

The mood at Mount St. Michael's is somber. "People are walking around feeling very heavy—it's a heavy environment right now," Brother Schlitte said. "Every day since it's happened, I make sure I go out and talk to kids, and coaches, too," he said, to assess the situation.

A prayer service was offered in the school chapel Wednesday, Aug. 23. After the prayer service, ADAPP (Archdiocese Drug Abuse Prevention Program) counselors were available throughout the day and return to the school periodically to check on the students.

Grief counselors have been at the school, including at practice, to help students cope with the tragedy. On the day CNY spoke with Brother Schlitte, he had just had a phone conversation with an ADAPP counselor at the Mount, about her schedule for the following day. "She walks out to the field even," Schlitte said, "and she stands there and watches practice for a while, just to see how kids are doing."

"I think, for the most part, kids are being kids," Brother Schlitte said. "They're practicing, they're out there, they're doing their thing, but when you talk to them, it's very much on their minds."

As for the circumstances on the football field the day that Dominick died, "The school did everything by the book," Brother Schlitte said.

"We are awaiting the autopsy report so we can find out exactly what happened. Dominick died in the hospital; he did not die on the field."

Freshman orientation at Mount St.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Mount St. Michael...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Michael is Thursday, Sept. 7. All grades begin classes Friday, Sept. 8. "As each of the classes come in on the first day, we always have an assembly, so we certainly intend to talk to the kids about it," Brother Schlitte said.

The principal said he plans to underscore to students that "life is precious, and be grateful."

The school's opening Mass on Sept. 29—the Feast of the Archangels St. Michael (the school's patron), St. Gabriel and St. Raphael—will be offered in Dominick's memory.

A number of Mount St. Michael alumni have contacted the school president, Peter Corritori Jr., a 1971 alumnus, to inquire about initiating a memorial scholarship in Dominick's name. In response, the school has established a fund to receive gifts made in Dominick's memory to help defray funeral expenses and to create a scholarship fund in his name. For more information, visit the school's website, www.mtstmichael.org, or call (718) 515-6400, ext. 267.

Burial will be at Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx.