



Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



08/16/2010 Curtis Snyder, Associate SID

CU Skier Nelson Dies In Hiking Accident

BOULDER - University of Colorado ski team member **Spencer Nelson** died in a hiking accident Saturday near Aspen. He was 20.

At approximately 10:25 a.m. Saturday, after Nelson and his group of seven others including his father, Peter, had already summited one of the 14,000-foot Maroon Peaks, he was struck in the head by a dislodged rock. He fell into the Bell Chords couloir, according to Alex Burchetta, spokesman for the Pitkin County Sheriff's Office.

Maroon Bells is a popular hiking destination in the White River National Forest just south of Aspen.

According to Burchetta, officials received a call shortly after 11 a.m. and by 11:45 a.m., members of Mountain Rescue Aspen, the Aspen Volunteer Fire Department, the Pitkin County Sheriff's Office, the U.S. Forest Service and Flight for Life had begun a rescue attempt.

Two off-duty mountain rescue volunteers, one of which was a paramedic and registered nurse, were hiking nearby and reached Nelson, staying until rescue crews arrived. Helicopter rescue could not reach the Bell Chords couloir, which is estimated about 13,000 feet, and dropped a rescue team above the area. He was pronounced dead at the scene and

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recovery operations were suspended at dusk and will resume Sunday, according to Burchetta.

"This is a terrible tragedy," CU ski coach **Richard Rokos** said. "For everybody involved - parents, friends, his team, coaches, anybody who had ever met him - it's a terrible waste of life, talent and ambition."

An avid outdoorsman and experienced hiker, Maroon Bells was the 18th 14er that Nelson had summited. He also listed mountain biking, weight lifting and rafting on his list of hobbies along with skiing and hiking. He had traveled to Europe three times and South America once for outdoor adventures.

"His family wanted everyone to know he was an outdoor enthusiast and ski racer for CU's Division I ski team who was eagerly seeking to summit all of Colorado's 14ers," Burchetta told the *Denver Post*.

In May of 2009, Nelson was involved in a life threatening motorcycle accident which required him to have spleen embolization surgery.

He had a quick recovery from that accident and reported in time for fall training as a true freshman at CU in August. Once the season began, he quickly established himself as one of the best giant slalom racers on the team and his seventh place finish at the RMISA Championships helped enable the Buffs to qualify a full 12-member team for the NCAA Championships.

"For somebody to recover from injury and do what he did last year was unusual," Rokos said. "The fact he was a freshman even more so. It's just a terrible tragedy, there's not much more to say than that."

He finished his freshman campaign with nine top 20 performances and finished 21st in the giant slalom and 23rd in the slalom at NAAs, helping the team to a second-place finish. He was honored with the Lucie Hanusova Memorial Award, which is given for those who overcome adversity and challenges with smiles and enthusiasm. After the season, he was honored by *Colorado Ski Country USA* in its Double Diamond Awards as male all-star athlete of the year.

Nelson graduated from Middle Park High School in Granby, Colo., in 2008 and lists Winter Park as his home town. There he played soccer and also lettered in track & field, competing in the 100- and 200-meter dashes. He skied for the Winter Park Competition Center from 1997-09 and was a member of the Colorado All-Star team from 2007-10, was named to the regional team in 2009-10 and was a Rocky Mountain Division National Team member in 2009.

Prior to enlisting at Colorado, he skied independently in several FIS-U races in 2009 that are the same races as collegiate skiers, and he took a pair of top 20 finishes, including a 10th place finish at CU's Laura Sharpe Flood Memorial Invitational in Eldora, especially impressive given the fact his original start order was 50th. He finished 19th at the U.S. Alpine National Championships in the giant slalom in Alyeska, Alaska, in March 2009, earning the fifth-best time in the field in his second run at that competition.

Born March 16, 1990 in Denver, Nelson is survived by his parents, Peter Nelson and Peggy Smith, both CU alumni, and a brother, Connor, 18. His father works for CU in facilities management and is the lead architect on CU's remodel of the ski team building, underway this summer and fall. He was majoring in finance and marketing at Colorado.

Details of a memorial service are pending. Ski team members gathered Saturday afternoon awaiting news and held an informal team gathering Saturday evening.

(Reports from the Denver Post and KMGH's TheDenverChannel.com were used in this report).

SHOW MENU



CU Buffs skier Spencer Nelson remembered as 'an amazing kid'

Student, 20, killed in climbing accident near Aspen

By Amy Bounds, Camera Staff Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/15/2010 07:52:44 PM MDT

University of Colorado ski team members spent Sunday remembering teammate Spencer Nelson -- who died a day earlier in a climbing accident near Aspen -- before heading to Winter Park to support his family.

Nelson, 20, was on his way back down from climbing one of the 14,000-foot Maroon Peaks with a group of seven others, including his father, when he was hit in the head by a rock and tumbled 600 feet to his death.

Katie Hartman, a CU senior on the ski team, said she and others on the team are still in shock.

"It's so surreal," she said Sunday. "We're going to miss him dearly. He was an amazing kid. He would light up a room the minute he would walk in."

An avid outdoorsman and experienced hiker, Maroon Bells was the 18th 14er that Nelson had summited. Friends said his goal was to climb all of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks. Other interests included mountain biking, weight lifting and rafting.

"He was on the go all the time," Hartman said. "He worked so hard. I was always trying to get him to relax."

In May 2009, Nelson was involved in a life threatening motorcycle accident that required spleen surgery. But he made a quick recovery and reported in time for fall training as a freshman at CU last August.

Eric Davis, a CU junior and ski team member, said that when he first heard on Saturday that his teammate was in a climbing accident, he had hope that he would pull through.

"He's been through some very tough injuries before," Davis said. "He was a real tough kid."

He described Nelson as positive and happy,

"He was always smiling," Davis said. "He was just so positive about everything. He will be sorely missed."

During the ski season, Nelson established himself as one of the best giant slalom racers on the team, CU officials said. His seventh place finish at the Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Ski Association Championships helped the Buffs qualify a full 12-member team for the NCAA Championships.

Nelson finished his freshman season with nine Top 20 performances and finished 21st in the giant slalom and 23rd in the slalom at NAAs, helping the team to a second-place finish.

He was honored with the Lucie Hanusova Memorial Award after the season, which is given to those who overcome adversity and challenges with smiles and enthusiasm. After the season, he was honored by Colorado Ski Country USA in its Double Diamond Awards as male all-star athlete of the year.

"This is a terrible tragedy," CU ski coach Richard Rokos said in a written statement. "For everybody involved -- parents, friends, his team, coaches, anybody who had ever met him -- it's a terrible waste of life, talent and ambition."

Nelson was majoring in finance and marketing at CU.

"Spencer was a fine young man of character and ability, typical of our students at CU-Boulder and emblematic of the student-athletes on our ski team and those who represent the university on the field of competition in other sports," Chancellor Phil DiStefano said in a written statement.

Nelson is survived by his parents, Peter Nelson and Peggy Smith, and a brother, Connor, 18. His father works for CU in facilities management and is the lead architect on CU's remodel of the ski team building.

Details of a memorial service are pending.

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Climber killed in fall near Aspen a student at CU-Boulder

The Denver Post

Posted: 08/15/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

A 20-year-old climber died Saturday near Aspen after being struck on the head by a rock and tumbling about 600 feet into a couloir.

Spencer James Nelson, a student at the University of Colorado at Boulder and a member of its nationally ranked ski team, already had summited one of the 14,000-foot Maroon Peaks and was headed back down with seven other people, including his father.

On the traverse between the north and south peaks, at about 13,000 feet, one of the hikers dislodged a rock that hit Nelson on the head and he fell into the Bell Chord couloir, said deputy Alex Burchetta, spokesman for the Pitkin County Sheriff's Office.

Nelson was wearing a helmet at the time.

His companions lost sight of him after he fell.

Members of Mountain Rescue Aspen, the Aspen Volunteer Fire Department, the Pitkin County Sheriff's Office, the U.S. Forest Service and Flight for Life began a search at 11:45 a.m., Burchetta said. A Black Hawk helicopter from the Colorado National Guard also helped transport equipment and personnel for the effort.

Two off-duty Mountain Rescue members who happened to be hiking in the area found Nelson. Saturday evening, authorities confirmed that Nelson, of Winter Park, had died. Recovery operations will resume today.


"His family wanted everyone to know he was an outdoor enthusiast and ski racer for CU's Division I ski team who was eagerly seeking to summit all the Colorado fourteeners," Burchetta said.

Just two months ago, Colorado Ski Country USA recognized Nelson in its Double Diamond Awards as male all-star athlete of the year for helping CU's ski team to a second-place finish in NCAA competition. Honoring him at its June dinner in Denver, the organization noted that less than a year earlier, Nelson had broken his back in a motorcycle accident.

"His fantastic alpine skiing record and his academic accomplishments highlight his determination, work ethic and perseverance," the organization said at the time.

Nelson majored in finance and marketing at CU.

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CU Student Dies On Maroon Bells

20-Year-Old Falls After Being Hit By Rockfall

Ana Cabrera, 7NEWS Anchor/Reporter

POSTED: 2:54 pm MDT August 14, 2010

UPDATED: 8:19 pm MDT August 15, 2010

ASPEN, Colo. -- A University of Colorado student died Saturday after falling on the Maroon Bells.

Twenty-year-old Spencer Nelson was pronounced dead on the scene after falling nearly 600 feet down the mountain.

Alex Burchetta, spokesman with the Pitkin County Sheriff's Office, said his office received a call shortly after 11 a.m. about the accident.

Spencer was struck by a fallen rock while in the Bell Chord couloir on the popular 14er. Burchetta said Spencer was wearing a climbing helmet and climbing with a group of eight people, including his father.

"His parents wanted people to know he was an avid outdoor enthusiast," Burchetta said. "And he was up here on the hike and attempting to summit all of Colorado's 14ers."

"At first, when we heard he fell and rescuers had reached him all of us I think believed he was going to be alright, because honestly he's such a fighter," said his CU ski teammate Eric Davis.

Teammates took the news hard. Nelson had always seemed larger than life.

"He was always so excited about everything in life ... everything," Davis said.

"He showed passion like know other that I've seen. For him it was toward ski racing and the CU ski team in particular," said Assistant Coach Arman Serebrakian.

That passion was matched by talent and hard work. As a freshman, Nelson was one of three men on the team to qualify for the NCAA championships.

"He was definitely inspiration," said Katie Hartman, another teammate.

He was a survivor, as well. Last summer Nelson almost lost his life in a motorcycle accident.

"He severely broke his back and punctured his spleen. He had a collapsed lung and spent a lot of time in the hospital in severe condition," said Davis.

"None of us thought he would ever ski again," added Hartman

Yet, he went on to be one of the best.

"His motto was no struggles, no progress. And he lived by it every day," Hartman said.

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