

Complications from car accident claims life of All-American center

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Former Colorado running back Rashaan Salaam will tell you center Bryan Stoltenberg and the rest of the Buffs offensive linemen won the Heisman Trophy in 1994 as much as he did.

Stoltenberg helped pave the way for Salaam to rush for more than 2,000 yards and win college football's most prestigious individual award during his junior season in Boulder. He later became a consensus All-American and a NFL draft pick. Stoltenberg died Friday at his home in Sugarland, Texas while recovering from major injuries suffered last month in a car accident. He was 40.

Stoltenberg is survived by his wife, Laura, and three sons, Austin, 16; Jacob, 14; and Andrew, 11.

Legendary CU coach Bill McCartney said he was devastated by the news Friday when Stoltenberg's former teammate, fellow offensive lineman and close friend Derek West called to tell him.

"What a great kid, what a good teammate, and what a great competitor," McCartney said. "It's just tragic. I can only imagine the crushing loss his family is experiencing."

CU issued a press release late Friday afternoon about Stoltenberg's death. The school reported Stoltenberg is believed to have died from a blood clot caused by one of multiple surgeries he endured after the accident.

Several of Stoltenberg's former teammates paid tribute to him in the report from the school, including West, Salaam, Kordell Stewart, Keith Miller and Matt Russell.

"Bryan was a dear friend, loyal father, husband and an amazing teammate," West said. "While we mourn the loss of this great man, we're comforted knowing that Bryan is in a better place. I will always remember Bryan's infectious laugh and smile. He had this bigger than life aura about him and this consumed all those around him. He constantly had an upbeat attitude and outlook at everything life threw at him.

"I will greatly miss my dear friend and cherish all the memories we had on and off the field."

Stoltenberg started all 44 games during his CU career. He was only the second Buff to start every game of his career. He also became only the second center in school history to be named all-conference twice during his career. He was named an All-American by three different organizations in his senior season in 1995.

Stoltenberg played 50 games in the NFL after being drafted by the San Diego Chargers but a knee injury cut short his career.

"I always believed that those awards were honoring all of us, and Stoli being the center was the heart of that great offensive line," Salaam said in the school's release. "They all went on to play in the NFL, that's how good that group is, and to learn that one of them is now gone is just devastating to me, to all of us."

Stewart took snaps from Stoltenberg for three seasons at CU. He said "Stoli" as he was known to friends and former teammates, meant the world to him.

"We had great chemistry," Stewart said. "I can't tell you how many times I would be running down field and if

he didn't pave the way for that to happen with a great block, he was in front of me looking to make one. A great player, even a better person."

Longtime CU sports information director Dave Plati said the loss was immeasurable.

"Bryan was one of those people you take an immediate liking to," Plati said. "Personable, almost always smiling, cracked jokes when something funny needed to be said. Your stereotypical offensive lineman -- monster on the field, teddy bear off it. Teammates, coaches, fans, media, everyone loved him. This just flat out hurts, and the situation is so sad. Survives a near fatal accident and then this has to happen.

"He loved CU to the end, the family did. He proudly wore CU gear, one son is a huge CU basketball fan. On his wife's (Laura) Facebook page are their three sons, posed at an overlook on Flagstaff Mountain, with a snow covered Boulder in the background. Just how we all love it."

Services are pending, but will be either Monday or Tuesday at the Sugarland Baptist Church in the southwest suburbs of Houston (located near US 59 and Sweetwater Blvd.).