

Former ETBU coach killed in crash with USW golf teams

March 17, 2022

Tyler James, former coach at East Texas Baptist University, was among the nine people killed in a March 15 two-vehicle crash northwest of Midland.



Tyler James

James, 26, was in a passenger van with the men's and women's golf teams from the University of the Southwest in Hobbs, N.M., who had competed in a tournament in Midland. James was in his first year as head coach of the golf teams at USW.

The team van was traveling northbound on FM 1788 in Andrews County when a pickup truck crossed the center line of the two-lane road and struck the van head on, causing both vehicles to catch on fire.

James and six USW students on the van were killed, along with the driver of the pickup truck and his passenger. Two other students were transported by helicopter to Lubbock, where they remain hospitalized.

James earned his undergraduate degree from Howard Payne University before moving to ETBU to serve as graduate assistant coach for the Tiger

men's and women's golf teams and pursue his master's degree.

After he completed his Master of Science degree in kinesiology at ETBU last year, he became head coach of the men's and women's golf programs at USW.

The ETBU community was "shocked" and saddened by news of Tyler's death and the deaths of the USW students, said President J. Blair Blackburn.

"This news weighs heavy on us because these are people we know," Blackburn said. "Not only did Coach James serve here at ETBU for two years and graduate with his master's degree, but we know his team through competition and the bond that links all athletes. We are all connected and need to be there for one another in these times of grief and trial."

Blackburn noted the campus community already was grieving the March 9 death of A.J. Gibson, who had graduated with his undergraduate degree from ETBU last December. Gibson was pursuing his Master of Business Administration degree at ETBU at the time of his death. He had been a member of the university's track and field team.

Ryan Erwin, vice president of athletics at ETBU, praised James as one who "shared his faith and shared his story" with student athletes. He noted James' involvement in Bible studies, discipleship, mission trips and weekly service projects with the ETBU golf teams.

James "believed in cultivating relationships and investing in other people," said Sydney Harvey, head coach of the Tiger golf teams.

"You could call him day or night with anything you needed, and he would make himself available. Not only because he just genuinely wanted to help, but because he just had such a big heart," Harvey said.

“If there was one person that you could really use as an example of a servant leader, it was Tyler James. Our Tiger golf team is all about family, faith and discipline, and Tyler fit into that culture perfectly.”