St. Thomas freshman dies on trip to Mexico

Police are investigating the death of Josh Gunderson, 20. Unofficial reports say he possibly fell and hit his head.

By **MARY LYNN SMITH,** Star Tribune

Last update: March 26, 2009 - 12:19 AM

Police in Mexico are investigating the death of a 20-year-old University of St. Thomas student who was on a spring break vacation in Puerto Vallarta.

Officials with the American Consulate General in Guadalajara said Josh Gunderson died early Tuesday morning. Manuel Banuelos, a spokesman at the consulate, said that unofficial reports indicate Gunderson was with two other Americans when he possibly fell and hit his head.

"This is an ongoing investigation and this is the only information I have," Banuelos said.

Gunderson, a 2007 Stillwater High School graduate, is a freshman at the University of St. Thomas.

Marta Engelking, 20, a St. Thomas sophomore and one of Gunderson's best friends dating back to high school, spoke to Gunderson's family Wednesday as they waited for details about his death.

"We know they found him in a hotel room [bathroom]. ... He died from an injury to the head and it was instantaneous," Engelking said. "But they don't have the exact story as to what happened. ... Originally they said it was an accident and now they're investigating to figure out what else could have happened.

"It's really hard not having questions answered and not knowing," Engelking said.

Gunderson attended St. Mary's University of Minnesota last year and transferred to St. Thomas this year to study business, Engelking said.

At Stillwater High School, Gunderson was the varsity hockey team captain in his junior and senior years. "He was an amazing hockey player," she said. "Small. He was 5-foot-6. ... He was that quick offense guy."

At St. Thomas, he played on the hockey club team, where he became fast friends with Jonathan Meyers, a sophomore.

"Gundy was really a spontaneous person," Meyers said. "He was up for anything and going anywhere. He was a down-to-earth guy. I just loved the kid."

According to friends, Gunderson joined St. Thomas student Ashley Jones on the trip to M exico and may have met other friends there. According to Mexican press reports, the Sheraton Hotel room where Gunderson was found dead was registered to David Jensen Zachary.

"This has been really hard to deal with," said Blake Gauer, a St. Thomas junior and Gunderson's teammate on the club hockey team. "There's just been a lot of speculation."

"What makes this so hard is that this couldn't have happened to a nicer kid," he said. "He was so open to meeting everyone and instantly became friends with everyone. ... He would do anything for any of us ... It was never an inconvenience for him to go out of his way, not just to help someone but he would do anything just to improve your day."

"He probably was the littlest on the team," Gauer said. "But he had the biggest heart. ... He was extremely skilled. He was the kid out there who was always at practice, always

having a good time."

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