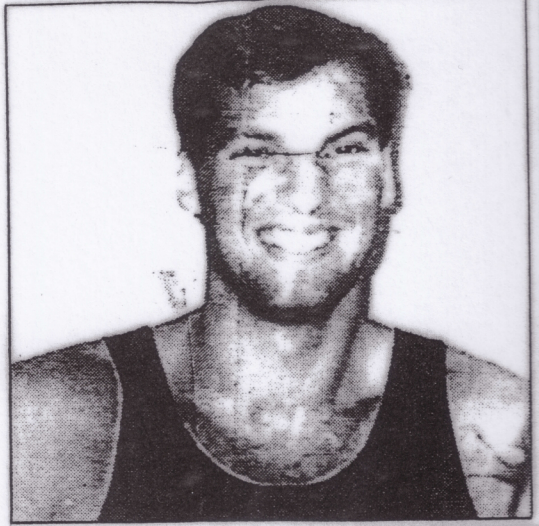


Pigeon link cited in fatal mystery illness



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WHEN US basketballer John Anderson arrived in Newcastle last month, club officials were shocked at the change to their star import.

They recalled the gentle, super-fit giant of two seasons earlier.

This time Anderson was withdrawn, looked ill and had lost weight.

Anderson arrived on March 27 for a second season with the Newcastle Hunters.

On April 10, he died, the victim of a rare disease, fungal meningitis, that still baffles doctors.

The deterioration in Anderson's health was sudden.

Last year, he played basketball in Israel and Hong Kong before returning to work in Maine, on the east coast of the US.

Just days before he flew to Australia, Anderson was struck down with pneumonia.

He thought he had recovered. But on arrival in Australia, he came down with what he thought was a sinus infection.

Experts say Anderson would have recovered from both those ailments, but when the fungal meningitis set in, he had little hope.

Anderson was only 27. He was 206cm tall, and weighed about 115kg. The main question prompted by his death appears to be how he died so quickly.

Doctors believe the fungal meningitis must have been dormant in Anderson's system as there was not enough time between his arrival and death for him to have contracted and incubated the disease.

Nevertheless, they are shocked at the speed of his death once fungal meningitis had been diagnosed.

Though it requires special care, fungal meningitis normally can be treated, unless

By DAMIAN BARRETT

John Anderson: Club shocked by change to gentle giant.

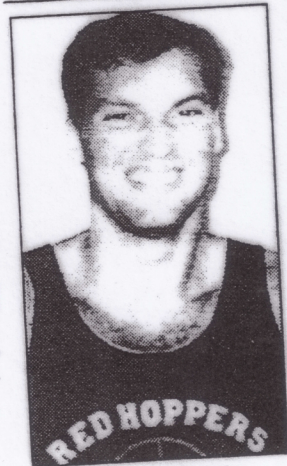
there are underlying diseases in the patient's system, which in this case, were either pneumonia or sinus problems.

Fungal meningitis is uncommon, although one expert says it claims the lives of "between five and 10 people a year" in Australia.

Fungal meningitis causes inflammation and blood-clotting in the brain. It also can affect the spinal cord.

It is nearly always caused by a fungus found only in central and Western Australian river red gums, or sometimes in pigeon droppings.

The fungus is breathed into the lungs before travelling to the brain.



John Anderson

Brain illness kills basketball star

AMERICAN basketball import John Anderson has died in Newcastle's John Hunter Hospital from fungal meningitis only weeks after coming to Australia.

The 206cm forward was brought over to play for the Newcastle Hunters in the Continental Basketball Association — one level below the National Basketball League.

Newcastle Hunters manager Dave Murray said yesterday Anderson,

27, managed to play only two trial games in Grafton before tests showed he was developing large blood clots in the brain and spinal cord.

He had only been in Australia for a week before being hospitalised last month and died on Sunday.

Fungal meningitis is a rare disease and is usually caused by fungus in pigeon droppings and some Australian red river gums.