

Drowning victim, 14, remembered

BY MARWA SIAM, THE GAZETTE AUGUST 27, 2012

Fourteen-year-old Yann-Moise Philipe Bappo-Mpondo, who came to Canada last year from Cameroon, had ambitions of becoming a professional athlete.

"He used to tell me that he'd become the best player for the Cameroon national soccer team," said his 17-year-old sister, Joyce Bappo-Mpondo.

He won't get that chance. On Aug. 8, the avid soccer player climbed over a fence in LaSalle to find his ball. He somehow ended up in the swimming pool surrounded by the fence. Unable to swim, he drowned.

Friends and family gathered at his visitation service on Saturday afternoon.

"We fought like all brothers and sisters do, but he'd always make sure to apologize first," Joyce Bappo-Mpondo said of her brother, who was the youngest of five children.

"I remember asking where he was going that night and all he said was, 'I'll be back, Joyce.' "

The family immigrated to Canada in October 2011. Yann-Moise's father and half-brothers still live in Cameroon.

With half of his family members living in his native country, some have considered flying the body there to be buried so the rest of his family can see him one last time.

Friends and schoolmates from Cavelier-De LaSalle high school were seen comforting his family.

His uncle, Herbert Moume Eyoum, said that while there is no one to blame for this tragedy, something needs to be done to ensure safety in and around public pools.

"I feel that this could have been prevented if the public spaces were a little safer," he said.

Moume Eyoum hosted the family in his Châteauguay home when they arrived in Canada. He described Yann-Moise as a gifted boy.

"It's horrible. He was very smart and respectful and had so much potential, and he hadn't even been in the country for a year."

This Thursday would have been Yann-Moise's 15th birthday.

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