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KENTUCKY

## Third body found after Fourth of July swimming accident in Leslie County

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The four men were swimming on the upstream side of the dam before the current swept them over. Tony Hoskins, the only survivor, managed to reach the riverbank and climb to safety.



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**HYDEN** — Three men from the same family died after they were swept away by the rain-swollen current during a Fourth of July outing on the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River.

Rescuers on Tuesday recovered the body of Tim Blevins about half a mile below a dam on the river, near Hyden. On Monday, Blevins' brother, Larry Blevins, 36, and Kendall Estep, 30, their brother-in-law, had been pronounced dead.

They were among a group of four relatives who went swimming on the Fourth of July at a spot on the river near Leslie County High School. The fourth, Tony Hoskins, 18, survived after being swept over the dam while trying to help Larry Blevins, his stepfather.

Larry Blevins and Estep lived in Leslie County. Tim Blevins, whose age was not available, was a native of the county but lived in Indiana, a family member said.

Autopsies are scheduled Wednesday, but the three men presumably drowned after the holiday outing turned deadly.

The accident happened near the high school, at a spot where Hyden draws water from a pool behind a dam. There had been storms in the area Sunday and Monday, raising the river and making the current stronger, authorities said.

Gary Sandlin, a state police detective investigating the accident, said Hoskins told him the water was rising as the four swam, and they planned to leave. But they didn't make it out in time.

The current pushed Larry Blevins over the dam. Hoskins tried to help him and was swept over as well, and the other two men went to help them, Sandlin said.

Hoskins said he was in the churning water below the dam when his uncle, Tim Blevins, got him by the arm but then had to let go, Sandlin said.

Sandlin said Hoskins was swept down the river but managed to get to the bank and climb out. He was the only survivor.

Witness Lane Collett said he and several friends were tossing around a football at the high school field Monday when middle school principal Dana Coots, said he thought he saw a body in the river, which borders the field.

Collett said he and his brother Randen Collett, 19, and their cousin, Chase Hoskins, 17, ran into the water to catch the man floating by, cutting their feet in the process. A friend, Blake Bray, called 911, Collett said.

They caught Kendall Estep. But Collett said he and the others couldn't get Estep out of the cold, rushing river because there was no embankment at the spot. So they held his head out of the water and struggled to keep their footing while waiting for help.

"It was pretty horrifying," Collett said of the ordeal.

Collett said Estep had a pulse, was warm to the touch and had color in his face when the group first caught him.

But he estimated it took about 45 minutes for an ambulance crew to reach them. Before that happened, Estep spit up water.

There was no way to perform CPR as they stood in the river, Collett said.

"It took 'em way too long to get to us," Collett said of the ambulance crew. "We did the best we could do."

State police say they were notified of the accident about 7:30 p.m. Jimmy Darrell Couch, deputy coroner in Leslie County, said he pronounced Estep dead at Mary Breckenridge Hospital in Hyden at 9:30 p.m.

Tony Hoskins was hospitalized after the accident. A close friend, Matthew Joseph, 17, said he had gotten a text message from Hoskins, who said he was lucky to survive.

"A lot of my friends who went to the hospital said he was pretty much in shock," Joseph said.

Family members said Larry Blevins, who drove a coal truck, was married and had six children. Estep was married and had three children.

The two were hard-working, good family men, relatives said.

"He'd do anything to help anybody that he could," Barbara Collett, an aunt of Blevins' wife, Jessica, said of Blevins.

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