

Former Sun Devils running back charged with murder

BY MEL REISNER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEMPE, Ariz. — Former Arizona State running back Loren Wade was charged Tuesday with first-degree murder in the shooting of another former Sun Devils player.

The 21-year-old Wade has been held without bond since Saturday, when he was arrested at the slaying site outside a Scottsdale, Ariz., nightclub. Witnesses say they saw him approach the car of Brandon Falkner, and exchange words with Falkner before a gunshot rang out.

Falkner, 25, was killed by a bullet. Before Wade was charged Tuesday, Arizona State head coach Dirk Koetter said at a news conference he had been concerned by Wade's behavior since September, but never interpreted any of it as cause for alarm.

"I did not connect that dot," Koetter said. "I missed it."

Koetter said Wade made verbal threats against two female athletes and was involved in two other incidents. Koetter declined to elaborate.

Wade's girlfriend, former Arizona State soccer player Haley van Blommestein, is one of two women who felt Wade threatened them.

The other was gymnast Trisha Dixon, who told her coach John Spini that Wade was enraged at her because she told a friend she saw Wade with another woman, and word got back to van Blommestein and Wade, who were living in Los Angeles.

Wade phoned Dixon on Nov. 24 and allegedly warned her to stay out of his business.

"There was no gun involved in that threat," Spini said. "But she was afraid for her life, she said. 'Just don't be walking alone.' To me, that's a threat."

Spini said Dixon asked him not to

get the police involved, and the incident blew over after Wade apologized to both of them.

Wade set a school freshman rushing record in 2003, but played only three games last year before he was suspended for the season for receiving improper benefits involving an overdue utility bill.

Even earlier, Wade was troubled. He told Koetter in September he wanted to give up football out of fear of getting hurt.

"I've never had a player tell me that," said Koetter, who sent Wade to a counselor. Koetter theorized that Wade was feeling guilty about the improper-benefits scandal, which involved the firing of a school compliance officer for using her line of credit to pay his utility bill.

At some point after Wade's suspension, he broke off the counseling sessions.

IN BRIEF

Seahawks sign defensive back Herndon for five years

KIRKLAND, Wash. — Kelly Herndon was on the verge of falling out of football so often he had no choice but to be mentally strong.

After being cut three times and spending a season on the Denver practice squad before catching on with the Broncos, Herndon's perseverance has paid off with a five-year, \$15 million contract with the Seattle Seahawks.

"I am elated, and it's just a blessing," Herndon said Tuesday at team headquarters, adding he can tell his story back in his hometown of Twinsburg, Ohio, to prove "that you can keep working at what you do and never give up."

Herndon started all 16 games for the Denver Broncos last season and led the team with 20 passes defended and was fifth with 77 tackles. He had two interceptions.

He will join a talented but young secondary in Seattle, including cornerback Marcus Trufant and safeties Ken Hamlin and Michael Boulware.

He is expected to take the spot of Ken Lucas, who signed a six-year contract with the Carolina Panthers. Lucas tied for the NFC lead with six interceptions last season.

Herndon will be reunited with Seattle defensive coordinator Ray Rhodes, who held the same position in Denver in 2001 and 2002. The possibility of playing for Rhodes was a factor in Herndon's decision.

"I like how he goes about what he does," Herndon said. "I like how the defense plays and they get after it, and it's a chance to get out there and make plays to help this team win. It's a great situation."

Seattle signed Herndon, a restricted free agent, to an offer sheet March 17. Denver had one week to match the Seahawks' offer and chose not to. Because Herndon had signed with the Broncos as an unrestricted free agent, Seattle will not lose a draft pick.

Herndon's looking forward to his chance to grow with Seattle's youthfulness secondary.

"I like how they play," Herndon said. "It's a young group, but we're definitely going to jell together and get it done."

— The Associated Press



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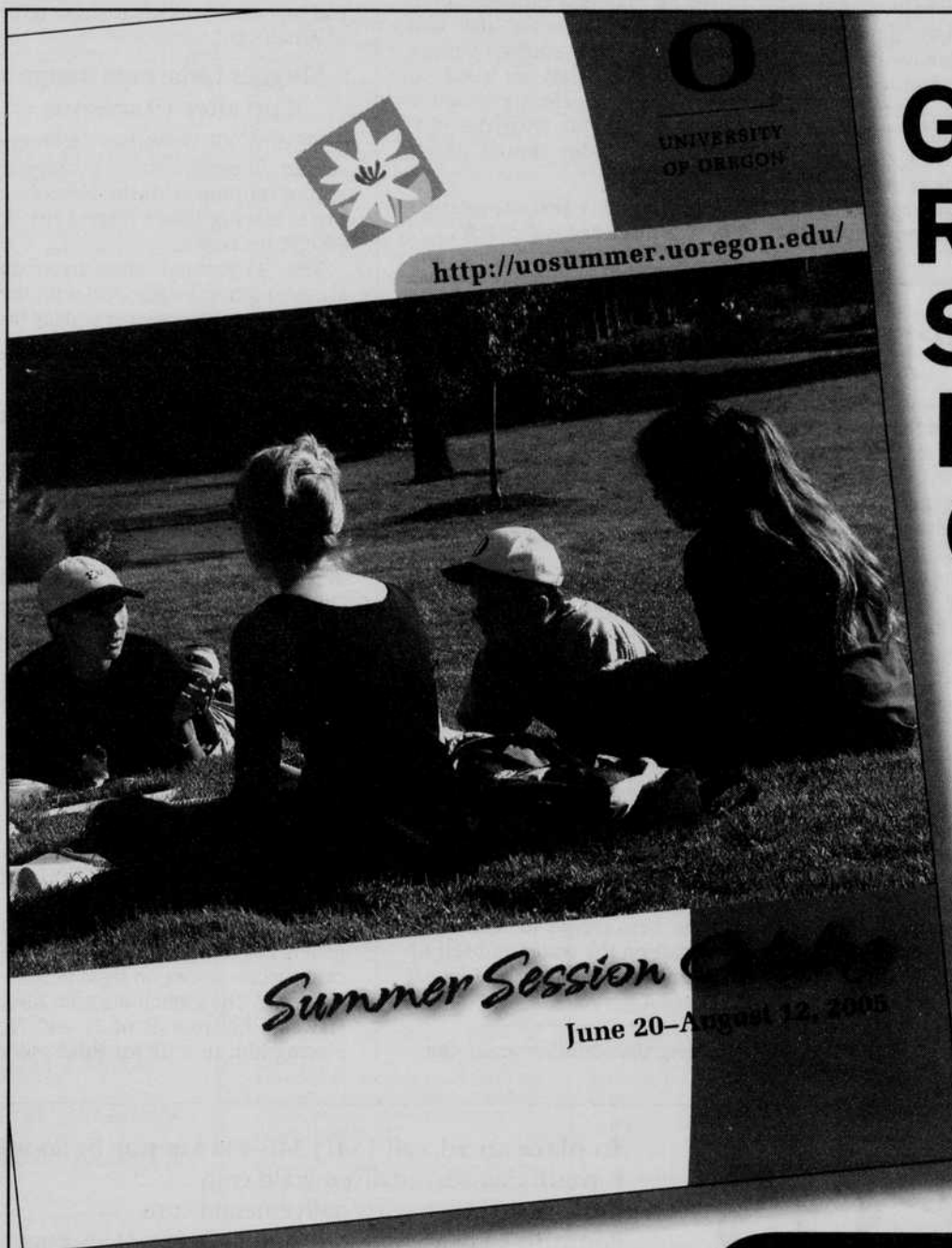
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