NWU-Sociologist dies after playing squash

An award-winning scholar of Potchefstroom who would have soon been a full professor, died after he collapsed after a squash match.

Prof. Freek Cronjé (53), a sociologist, was a seasoned academic with many publications to his credit. Cronje was an associate professor and would have been promoted in two weeks to full professor, his wife, Estelle, said yesterday.

She said he played squash last Friday with his longtime squash partner, Alex Paiva.

"He had difficulty breathing and walked out to get fresh air." Cronje collapsed and died shortly afterwards. It is unclear what exactly caused his death.

Estelle and their daughter, Daniela (19), were in Johannesburg when they got the news. "I could not believe it," Estelle said. The family was planning to go dining in Johannesburg to celebrate the birthday of the couple's son, Edrich (17).

Estelle, a pharmacist, said Cronjé cycled and played squash at least twice a week. "He had his (annual) full medical examination again two weeks ago. Heart tests and his cholesterol were normal."

"He was my safety net, a peaceful man for whom nothing was too difficult. Freek was incredibly loved in my and his family."

Cronjé was, among others, Director of the North-West University (NWU) Bench Marks Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility and program leader for the NWU's focus area for social transformation. He spoke at conferences worldwide and was a guest speaker last month at an international conference in India.

Tributes have poured in since Cronjé's death.

Prof. Fika Janse van Rensburg, acting Rector of the Potchefstroom Campus, said Cronjé made his mark as a "friend, scholar and colleague".

Piet Beukes (Bench Marks Foundation board member) praised Cronjé on Facebook for his team's "outstanding sociological research". "It was quality research in the fight against corporate abuse of power and irresponsible social and ecological management."

Cronjé's memorial service is tomorrow (Wednesday) 11:00 in the NG-East congregation in Potchefstroom.

Susan Cilliers, 05 April 2016