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Brilliant scientist was killed by boy racer, inquest is told

A BRILLIANT scientist was killed while cycling in New York when he was struck by a speeding boy-racer, an inquest in Harrogate heard this week.

A verdict of unlawful killing was recorded on former Ripon Grammar School pupil David Ryan, 32, whose parents live at Bishop Monkton, near Ripon.

The Coroner for the Western District of North Yorkshire, Geoff Fell, who expressed his condolences to Dr Ryan's parents and brother, commented: "What a waste".

Teenager Joshua Paniccia, who pleaded guilty at Saratoga County Court to criminally negligent homicide after Dr Ryan died in June, 2004, was sentenced to one to three years in state prison with youthful offender status.

Mr Fell told Wednesday's inquest that 18 year old Paniccia was classed as a young offender in the United States and as a result the authorities had refused to co-operate with his inquiries.

"Because this man is classed as a young offender the file has been sealed and put away. The only information I have got is from newspaper reports."

He read extracts in which Assistant District Attorney James Davis said Paniccia had three previous speeding offences against him and had also been given a ticket for road racing in Niskayuna.

Although Paniccia claimed he was only driving "a little fast", Mr Davis said: "I think 83 miles an hour is more than a little fast. It's outrageously fast. And I think it's criminally negligent and that's what the conviction was for today."

Mr Davis said Paniccia was driving a high performance car on racing tyres and had previous offences for speeding. He said he was astonished that Paniccia's parents had not stopped him driving.

"They had a responsibility to society to take that vehicle away from him. It was a crime that he reached such incredible speeds - 90 mph in a 45mph zone."

Oxford graduate Dr Ryan was head hunted by GE Global Research to work as a physicist on the development of MRI scanners for use in the Third World. He was a member of the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club and regularly rode long distances after finishing

work.

He was out on a 35-mile ride on a loop around the Mohawk River when he turned back because of the threat of rain. Paniccia's Nissan Sentra car hit him head-on after its driver lost control and skidded into the opposite lane.

Mr Fell told Dr Ryan's family: "I have to say that I have some difficulty with this in the sense that I cannot get information out of the police authorities. Paniccia had three speeding offences and he had been caught racing somewhere else.

"On this occasion he claimed he was trying to catch someone up, which sounds a lot like racing to me. I am going to record a verdict that David Ryan was unlawfully killed."

Outside the inquest, Dr Ryan's parents, who submitted a victim impact statement to the court and saw Paniccia sentenced in the United States, said they thought he had got off lightly. His father said: "He will probably be out next year."