

"They did everything they could": Runner fatally struck by lightning during race in Kansas

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<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/runner-struck-by-lightning-thomas-stanley-killed-lightning-strike-near-finish-line-flatrock-trail-race-2019-09-30/>

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A distance runner who was a father of three has been killed by lightning as he was about to cross the finish line for a 50 kilometer (31.07 mile) race in southeast Kansas. Thomas Stanley, 33, of Andover, was less than a quarter mile from finishing the FlatRock trail race at the Elk City State Park when he was struck around 2:15 p.m. Saturday, said race director Carolyn Robinson.

She said the day started off hot and sunny before a small storm hit the area about 150 miles southwest of Kansas City, Missouri, "without warning." Robinson said Stanley was struck "the moment the storm blew in." While some racers, including a doctor, attempted CPR, others in the crowd jumped in their vehicles and drove to a straight stretch of road that leads to the finish line, so other runners could get inside and out of the storm, she said.

"A lot of the participants who were there tending to him are having a very hard time dealing with this loss," she said. "They did everything they could."

Race organizers said in a Facebook post that Stanley was included as a finisher in the final results because, although he didn't cross the finish line, he completed the full distance.

CBS affiliate KWCH-TV of Wichita, Kansas, said Stanley's wife was presented the medal her husband would've been awarded.

"He was unable to cross the finish line unfortunately, but he is one of our finishers," said Robinson. The results show he came in 11th out of 104 competitors.

In a statement, his family described him as a "devoted husband, father, and friend." The couple had three children, the oldest just 6. Robinson said they are "devastated."

The race organizer reposted a Facebook collection of photos from Stanley's wife and wrote: "Thomas' family says that the chances of being killed by a lightning strike are about one in a million and Thomas was truly a one-in-a-million guy. Our deepest condolences to Thomas' family and all who knew this wonderful man."

Our hearts are with Ashley and the Stanley family. Thomas Stanley tragically passed away when he was struck by...

Posted by FlatRock 50K & 25K on Sunday, September 29, 2019

One of his friends, Ben Davis, 35, of Wichita, described Stanley as a "running evangelist" who had previously run at least two other much longer, 100-mile events. Davis ran alongside him to provide support for parts of those races.

"He loved the endurance challenge of overcoming the difficulty it would take on you," Davis said.

He said Stanley would prepare by running through the night and then going to work the next day on no sleep. Stanley worked for the nonprofit Kansas Leadership Center. Davis said Stanley focused on interfaith leadership development, teaching people to use their influence "no matter how big or how small to help others."

KWCH-TV noted that his co-workers never imagined Friday would be the final time they spoke to him.

"I was shocked that I spent all this time this week, I just, I couldn't, it didn't make sense," Stanley's co-worker Sam Smith told KWCH-TV. "I remember saying to him in a way that I don't usually like have a good weekend and good luck at the race."

The intensity he brought to running, he also brought to parenting, Davis added.

"Everybody who has kids knows how overwhelming it is, the chaos and the exhaustion. But he embraced it," Davis said. "He was just such a remarkable person."

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help the Stanley family.