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Rapper Big Pun dies at age 28

NEW YORK (AP) - Christopher Rios, the 698-pound platinum-selling rapper known as Big Pun, who was respected for his imaginative lyrics and smooth delivery, died Monday. He was 28.

Rios was stricken at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in suburban White Plains where he was staying with his family while their home was being renovated. He was pronounced dead on arrival at a hospital. A coroner said extreme obesity caused Rios' health problems, but a final determination on cause of death was pending.

"He was beloved and admired and accomplished and rich," said his publicist, David Granoff.

He credited Rios, who was Puerto Rican, with working to bring Latino entertainers into rap, a style dominated by black artists.

The rap world started to take notice of Rios - whose stage name was short for Big Punisher - after appearances with fellow rapper Fat Joe and a feature on "The Mix Tape Vol. 1" put together by Funkmaster Flex.

His street hit "You Ain't a Killer" was featured on the "Soul in the Hole" soundtrack, and his first album, "Capital Punishment," went double platinum and was nominated for a Grammy last year.

Rios' second album, "Yeah, Baby," was due in April.

"Big Pun possessed a lyrical gift of incessant breath control and a knockout punch with the rhymes," a reviewer wrote about the rapper for <http://www.sonymusic.com>.

Known earlier in his career as Big Moon Dog, the entertainer was once an avid basketball player and boxer, but

later said he took to eating until he couldn't tie his shoelaces.

Jimmy Rodriguez, a longtime friend, said people would miss Rios.


"Anybody that knew or ever came in contact with Big Pun would have walked away saying that they just walked away from a gentle giant," Rodriguez said. "He was so special."

Rios, who lived in the Bronx, was survived by his wife, Liza, and three young children, Christopher, Vanessa and Amanda.

Dr. Louis Roh, a Westchester County medical examiner, said Tuesday that Rios weighed 698 pounds at his death and had an enlarged heart and other problems. But the coroner said Rios had not suffered a heart attack and the cause of death would not be determined until tests were complete on drugs, alcohol and other toxins.

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