# Tragedy Strikes as U.S.-Born Kitefoiler J.J. Rice Passes Away in Diving Accident en route to Olympics



**U.S.-Born Kitefoiler J.J. Rice, Scheduled for Olympics, Dies in Tonga Diving Accident**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand – Jackson James Rice, an 18-year-old kitefoiler set to represent Tonga at the Paris Olympics, has died in a diving accident. Rice's father, Darren Rice, confirmed his son's passing to the Matangi Tonga newspaper. The accident occurred Saturday in Faleloa, on the island of Ha'apai in the Tonga archipelago.

Rice, who was free diving from a boat, suffered a suspected shallow water blackout. Resuscitation attempts were unsuccessful. Born in the United States to British-born parents, Rice grew up on Ha'apai, where his family operates a tourist lodge. He had recently been training in Europe and secured his Olympic spot by finishing eighth at the Sail Sydney event in December.

Kitefoiling, an event making its Olympic debut in Paris, involves racing on boards lifted off the water on foils, reaching speeds over 30 mph. Rice was set to be the first caucasian athlete to represent Tonga at the Olympics. His sister Lily expressed her grief in a Facebook post, acknowledging his impactful friendships and exceptional talent.