Family tributes after tallest man in UK dies
GAME OF THRONES STAR FOUND DEAD AGED JUST 36

By LAURA HILL

He was an ordinary son with a larger than life passion for acting.

While being the UK's tallest man came with its difficulties, it helped lead Neil Fingleton a role in the hit show Game of Thrones.

But the acting world is in mourning following Neil's sudden death on Saturday.

Now, the 36-year-old's devastated family have said of their heartsache as they come to terms with their loss - and said "he'd never felt better".

Speaking from the family home in Gilesgate, County Durham, Neil's mum Christine Fingleton said: "It's a dreadful shock, we are just devastated.

"What else can you say?"

Neil, 7th, was in Belfast filming for HBO fantasy series Game of Thrones - in which he played Mag the Mighty - before his death.

Despite reports Neil died from heart failure, his family are still in the dark about what killed him and are waiting for test results.

Neil's mum said Neil had been in good health and celebrated his 36th birthday shortly before Christmas.

"He'd never felt better, I don't sup-

pose," she said. "He looked forward to going back to filming and he really enjoyed working on Game of Thrones, though I must admit I never watched it myself."

Neil's stature brought him fame, and he was named the UK's tallest man by the Guinness World Records in 2017.

He was a well-known face on the playing circuit and in TV and film, and also took on roles in X-Men, Green Lantern, and Jupiter Ascending.

But his mum said his height would also come with its drawbacks. "It would be a struggle at times," she said. "It definitely would have been difficult to play on Game of Thrones, but he made the best of things and got on with it."

Neil, a former Gilesgate Comprehensive School pupil, had a successful basketball career before he got the acting bug.

He spent 10 years playing in the US and spent two years at the University of North Carolina before transferring to Holy Cross in Massachusetts.

Christine said: "His coach at Teesside, Tony Hansen, really encouraged him and supported him in his career."

But after a successful career playing professionally in Spain, China, Italy, Greece and England, he turned his attention to acting.

In 2014, Neil played Mag the Mighty in Game of Thrones, and the villain The Pheonix King in BBC's Doctor Who.

His mum remembers his first TV role was playing The Thinker in a Muller Light advert.

"That was really quite good," Christine said. "It went from there and a lot of people saw him on that."

While his family are still in shock, Christine says she has taken comfort from the outpouring of grief on social media. She said: "I am amazed with all the tributes - it is overwhelming really."

Neil leaves behind Christine, his brother Michael, 38, and 40-year-old sister Keeley. His father, Michael, died six years ago.

"We have always been a close family. He was very kind and very generous - all of us would say that," said Christine.

"He was actually quite private, he didn't like a lot of fuss."

"He had quite a dry sense of humour. I remember a few years ago he was ill after an operation on his toe. I would look round and see him every day so he bought a doormat that said 'oh no, not you again, which he thought was funny.'"