**Chris Bocklet's remarkable recovery from a traumatic brain injury inspires Virginia lacrosse**

**C**hris Bocklet lay in his hospital bed and turned on his cellphone. Well wishes from family, friends and people he had connected with all over the lacrosse community flooded in. They were the people closest to Bocklet.

And yet, he didn’t recognize a single name.

“He couldn’t think of who they were at all,” said his mother, Terry. “From day one, the outpouring of all of the messages, the support, the prayers, the healing vibes, all this incredible energy, it was very positive and it was just kind of surrounding us.”

Bocklet, the former Virginia lacrosse player, suffered a traumatic brain injury in a longboarding accident on New Year’s Day. The injury robbed him of his speech and his memory and caused seizures. He spent the next four months fighting to get his life back.

“The scariest time of my life,” said Bocklet, a three-time All-American at UVA and member of the 2011 national championship team. “I knew what a phone was and that it connected me to the outside world, but I was scared to open it up. It was overwhelming.”

Bocklet, 31, said it was the positive energy in those well-wishes, even when it came from names or faces he couldn’t recognize, that helped make his recovery a remarkable success story.

“All these people were texting me. And even if they were my best friends, I didn’t know their names,” he said. “But their words, I could kind of understand. ‘We believe in you.’ ‘You can do it.’ When I got these messages of support, it felt like I was back in the locker room and I had people behind me.”

Bocklet still doesn’t recall the accident that upended his life. He doesn’t remember grabbing the electric longboard and heading out for a helmetless skate on New Year’s Day. He doesn’t know what happened that day in Del Ray Beach, Fla., where he was vacationing, just that he came back to his girlfriend with a bleeding severe head wound.

He spent 14 days in the hospital in Jacksonville, then was flown to the Shepherd Center, a private facility specializing in spinal cord and brain injury rehabilitation, for another 14 days of recovery, working to retrain and repair his brain.

Somewhere in those first days, Terry started a group chat with family members, so they could easily communicate updates with each other. The first message she sent read, “We’re going to get our Chris back.”

Around the same time, former teammate Adam Ghitelman compiled a video of UVA lacrosse players and coaches, past and present, offering their support to Bocklet. He hardly blinked, Terry said, as he watched the four-minute presentation.

“He had no idea who the faces were, but there was just something about hearing the messages that I know he felt something there,” she said.

Though his stay at Shepherd was expected to last a month or even two, he completed his work there in a matter of weeks, returning home and beginning an eight-week program of brain rehabilitation at the Brooks Center near Jacksonville.

A road that began with Bocklet unable to say anything more than “yes, no and thank you,” — and not grasping their meanings — progressed to him identifying fruits. The apple was a particularly momentous breakthrough.

“It was kind of like being in another country and not knowing the language, having to relearn everything,” he said.

By the middle of the month, he was in the courtyard of the center, teaching therapists how to step and throw a lacrosse ball.

Bocklet finished that program on April 21. A day later, he flew to UVA to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the 2011 national title, show his girlfriend — who along with his mother had been his primary caregiver during his recovery — the school, and to speak to the current men’s and women’s teams.

Bocklet’s road back to health continues. He still can’t drive a car because of the potential for seizures. On Thursday afternoon, he was walking to play tennis, one of the ways he can still fulfill his desire for competition. He’s returned to work in the family business, helping to run and promote X10 lacrosse camps, destination camps that combine lacrosse with outdoor adventure sports.

He credits the healthy and structured lifestyle he lived before his accident with helping accelerate his recovery, from meditation, to breathing exercises to keeping a gratitude journal.

Four months after his accident shattered his world, Bocklet was back at Klöckner Stadium, laughing about his time as a bench warmer his freshman year, before he blossomed into a star. He talked about his signature goal celebration — a digging motion inspired by seeing the monster truck, Grave Digger, at John Paul Jones Arena — and recalled his rise to becoming a celebrated college and professional star.

“It puts a smile on your face the way he tells the story,” said UVA coach Lars Tiffany, whose team wore CB10 shoot-around shirts this year to honor Bocklet, who wore No. 10 as a player. “He’s an optimist.”

Bocklet, whose sister, Casey, also played for Virginia, spoke to the women’s team on Friday, delivering a message that was equally entertaining and inspirational.

“You can have everything and then in the blink of an eye, lose it and have to work and claw your way back to getting back on good ground again,” UVA women’s coach Julie Myers said. “It was the power of support and the power of positive thinking and just taking it a day at a time and a step at a time. It was being loved and then making sure you give that love and support right back to other people who are in need of it.”

For Bocklet, he returned to his alma mater to share some memories he feared he might have lost forever.

“I was so happy I still had that — my memories. They’re what define you,” Bocklet said. “I’m excited to pass on some of the experiences that I’ll never forget. And happy I can remember them.”

# For a high school lacrosse player stricken with cancer, game day at UVA is part of his quest for joy in his remaining time

When David Alexander III opted to stop his cancer treatments last month, he wasn’t giving up on his life. He was making sure he could live it to the fullest.

Alexander, a junior at Handley High School in Winchester and former college lacrosse prospect, passed on an aggressive surgery that would have amputated most of his lower body, required long hospitalizations and continued chemotherapy, and only had about a 25% chance of saving his life.

Instead, Alexander is using the time he has left to focus on the things he loves, and that love him back — family, friends and lacrosse.

“My doctors were basically saying I was going to pass either way,” Alexander said this week. “I don’t like saying I gave up. I’m having a better rest of my life, having a more comfortable, family-filled life than having a hospital life.”

Fresh off a family vacation to Florida, the 17-year-old Alexander — who is wheelchair-bound and still in constant pain due to his cancer — will be at Saturday’s Virginia lacrosse game against Air Force, a guest of the Cavaliers.

Alexander started playing lacrosse as a fourth grader and first fell in love with UVA when he attended a lacrosse camp there three years later. By his sophomore year at Handley he had begun drawing recruiting interest from Division II and III programs.

He was on the drive home from a tournament in Delaware when the pain in his left hip, which had plagued him for some time, became unbearable. After initially being misdiagnosed with a a pinched sciatic nerve, Alexander received the diagnosis — chondroblastic osteosarcoma.

It is a rare cancer of bone and cartilage that normally attacks limbs.

“This cancer eats through bone and replaces it,” said Alexander. “For me, it is right by my spine and my hip, where all the nerves go for your leg. There really isn’t a cure for it, besides just taking it out. We’re kind of stuck in the mud right now for what people can do with this type of cancer.”

He underwent 10 excruciating weeks of chemo treatments, the last coming shortly after Christmas. The course was unsuccessful. Alexander and his family met with a surgeon at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. She proposed the surgery.

“It would be completely taking off my hip, taking off my left leg, along with my crotch and my backside. I’d have tubes going through my stomach to go to the bathroom and I’d have another leg that might not work,” he said. “And If you don’t get it all out, it’s just going to keep growing. Even if you get it down to the smallest little cell, it’ll just grow again.”

Alexander chose to end his treatments and live out his remaining days managing his pain. In that option, Alexander saw something the more aggressive surgical plan didn’t offer. He saw good days.

Good days, he said, are what make his life worth living. Good days like the week he spent with his family in Florida, visiting Disney World, Sea World and Universal Studios. Good days like the one the travel-weary family spent in the middle of that week, just lounging around the pool, enjoying their time with each other.

And they’re days like Saturday, when Alexander will get to be a part of the lacrosse team he dreamed of one day playing for.

During Thursday’s practice, UVA’s players and coaches carried a bead with them. At Saturday’s game, they’ll present the beads, along with hand written notes of encouragement, to Alexander.

It’s part of a program called Beads of Courage which aims to connect child cancer patients around the country with athletes, entertainers and other prominent people.

Virginia got involved with Beads of Courage thanks to transfer attackman Charlie Bertrand, whose mother, Susan, works with the program.

The cause is deeply personal to the Bertrands. Susan’s sister — Charlie’s aunt — died of cancer 18 years ago at age 30. Charlie was six.

He’s been around and involved with the central New York foundation his mother started in her honor, Maureen’s Hope, ever since.

“He’s understood giving back and the importance of it since a young age,” said Susan. “If you’re ever having a bad day, or feeling down or depressed, the best thing you can do for yourself is to do something for somebody else.”

It was through her foundation that Susan started working with Beads of Courage, helping find children’s hospitals to launch the program in and, when possible, pairing them with sponsors. It costs about $10,000 to bring the program to a new location.

UVA was already a Beads of Courage hospital, but when Charlie transferred from Merrimack to Virginia, it connected the lacrosse program with the cause.

Alexander was still at UVA’s hospital receiving treatment when he first connected with the Cavaliers. Virginia’s team even visited Alexander for his birthday in November, having cake and celebrating at the temporary home in the Charlottesville area his family lived in during his treatment.

The team’s beads, however, were going to go to the program to be dispersed nationwide to patients — until the players learned of Alexander’s decision to stop treatment and his prognosis.

Coach Lars Tiffany told them after a recent practice. At that point, the players asked if all their beads and notes could go to Alexander.

“It’s about to be a tough period for him,” said Bertrand. “We figured that not only would it mean a lot to him to be able to read all these notes, but it would also mean a lot to the guys on the team having met him in the fall.”

Alexander is beyond appreciative of Virginia’s embrace of him, and of the charity organizations like Beads of Courage, the Make It Better foundation, which set up the family’s trip to Florida, and the Give Kids the World Village, which hosted the Alexanders during their stay.

But the reason Alexander shares his story, he said, is to try to raise awareness and funds for research. He hopes his efforts might help eventually lead to a cure, so another child won’t be faced with the choice he had to make. Maybe the next child will grow up and fulfill his or her dream of playing college lacrosse.

Alexander isn’t shy about discussing his situation, his decision or the inevitably of his future. He and his family are prepared to move him to hospice care in Winchester when his condition deteriorates.

In his darkest moments, Alexander worries that he’s quitting his fight, accepting the end. On days like Saturday, when people he’s only known for a short period applaud his bravery, it’s easier for him to see what they see — the courage in choosing to get the most out of his remaining time.

“I will be passing. There’s nothing I can do about what’s going to happen to me,” he said. “So I might as well have fun and make the most of what time I have left.”

# Former Virginia Tech soccer player sues coach, claiming she was forced off team for refusing to kneel before games

Former Virginia Tech women’s soccer player Kiersten Hening has filed a federal lawsuit against Hokies women’s soccer coach Chugger Adair, alleging that after she refused to join her teammates kneeling before games this season, the coach engaged in a “campaign of abuse and retaliation” that led her to leave the program.

“Hening’s stance was costly — too costly,” reads the lawsuit, filed March 3. “Her coach dislikes Hening’s political views. Because she refused to kneel, he benched her, subjected her to repeated verbal abuse, and forced her off the team.”

Adair, who just completed his 10th season at Virginia Tech and is the program’s all-time winningest coach, declined to comment. He is being represented by university attorneys.

The university is not named as a defendant in the suit, only Adair.

Mark Owczarski, associate vice president of university relations, said the school is declining comment at this time.

The suit seeks a ruling ordering Adair to “undergo First Amendment training,” and to have Hening reinstated on the team, in addition to unspecified monetary awards for compensatory, punitive and nominal damages and costs associated with her case.

Hening’s attorneys did not respond to phone calls or emails requesting interviews Sunday and Monday.

Hening, a 21-year-old Midlothian native and former star player at James River High School, walked onto the Virginia Tech team in 2018 and started as a freshman and sophomore.

She was in the team’s lineup for its opening match of the 2020 season, against rival University of Virginia. While her teammates knelt during the pregame reading of the Atlantic Coast Conference’s unity pledge — a show of support for the social justice movement and Black Lives Matter — Hening and one other unidentified player remained standing, according to the lawsuit.

Athletes kneeling before sporting events became a national issue in 2016, when then-San Francisco 49ers backup quarterback Colin Kaepernick did it during the national anthem. Since then, athletes showing their support for racial equality and social justice by taking a knee has been a hot-button topic, often dividing the athletes from segments of their fan bases.

This past season, a few members of the Virginia Tech basketball team knelt during the anthem, while most — all but three — players at rival UVA did.

Hening’s suit claims she “supports social justice and believes black lives matter,” but “does not support the BLM organization.”

(The BLM label has been widely used to refer to the movement for racial equality and social justice.)

The lawsuit alleges that, during halftime of the Sept. 12 season opener at UVA, “Coach Adair berated Hening for her stance. He singled her out and verbally attacked her, pointing a finger directly in her face. He denounced Hening for ‘bitching and moaning,’ for being selfish and individualistic, and for ‘doing her own thing.’”

According to the lawsuit, Adair targeted Hening instead of the other player who remained standing because that player was on scholarship and her parents had a previous phone conversation with Adair and had “warned him not to retaliate against their daughter for opposing (Black Lives Matter.)”

Hening’s suit claims Adair continued to single her out and unfairly criticize her performance before and during the team’s next match against Clemson on Sept. 17, a game Hening — who started 37 matches her first two seasons at Tech — did not start. She did not start the team’s third match of the season, against North Carolina on Sept. 20, either. After that game, she left the program.

“Coach Adair’s campaign of abuse and retaliation made conditions for Hening so intolerable that she felt compelled to resign. Hening did not want to leave,” the lawsuit reads.

Charles “Chugger” Adair is 126-62-20 in 10 seasons with the Hokies and has guided Tech to seven NCAA tournament appearances, including an appearance in the 2013 national semifinals. This year’s team went 8-9, ending its season Saturday with a 4-1 nonconference loss to Auburn. The NCAA was scheduled to announce its postseason bracket on Monday.

Adair, a 49-year-old California native and 1993 University of San Diego graduate, joined the Tech staff as an associate head coach in 2006 before being promoted to the top job after the 2010 season.

According to the lawsuit, Adair was strongly supportive of the ACC’s equality pledge and even suggested having players wear the names of victims of alleged police misconduct on their jerseys, and that his direct supervisor, senior associate athletic director Reyna Gilbert-Lowery, “is a vocal supporter of (Black Lives Matter.)”

According to the lawsuit, Adair was aware of Hening’s political views prior to the start of the 2020 season, when he and a group of players were shown screenshots of private text messages she had sent to teammates.

A group of players then demanded on Sept. 3 that Adair address what they viewed as the racism of some of their teammates.

The lawsuit suggests this was the beginning of the coach targeting Hening for her political views.