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REMEMBERING NOV. 13

One year later, Virginia football players keep the memories of their fallen teammates close

Greg Madia Nov 13, 2023 0



Week in Review



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otball program haven't gone a day without grieving or remembering the three fallen, beloved Cavaliers and teammates while laboring to honor their memory.

"Here, we have a promise to our three who've passed," defensive end Chico Bennett Jr. said last week about why UVA hasn't splintered in spite of falling short in close games and failing to achieve its goal of reaching the postseason.



From left to right: Devin Chandler, Lavel Davis Jr., and D'Sean Perry. UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA ATHLETICS

"So, we know we still need to come together," he continued, "because life isn't and tomorrow isn't promised."

Monday marked the one-year anniversary of the deaths of Lavel Davis Jr., D'Sean Perry and Devin Chandler, the three Uva players who were shot and killed after returning to Grounds after a class field trip to Washington, D.C.



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Davis, a 6-foot-7 wide receiver, towered over most and had the potential, perhaps, to go on to pro football. He was as kind to everyone and committed to improving his skills as anyone in the navy and orange, according to his coaches and teammates. Chandler, another wide receiver, was in his first season with the Cavaliers after transferring from Wisconsin but was already well liked in the locker room with his wide smile and upbeat personality. Perry played linebacker, defensive end and was used on special teams, and off the field, he was even more well-rounded with a talent for art and an appreciation for music.

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"It's going to be an emotional day," second-year UVa coach Tony Elliott said ahead of Monday's anniversary. "I'm looking forward to it, but at the same time, a little bit anxious because it's going to bring up a lot of emotions that we've been trying to work through and move forward with."



D'Sean Perry's name during the annual spring game at Scott Stadium.

...as endured having to manage and lead a football program in the wake of a devastating, unfathomable tragedy, and he said he's leaned heavily on his faith and his family to help him.

"You feel the weight of the world on your shoulders," Elliott said. "That's not just a college football coach. That's anybody, right? You're dealing with life, and life is hard, so faith is what carries you."



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"When you look in the eyes of the young men," he said, "it motivates you and encourages you just to take one step forward day after day and focus on doing everything you possibly can to help them. That's one of the challenges, but also one of the privileges of being called a coach, because people look to you."



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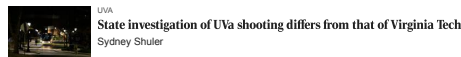
His players have looked toward running back Mike Hollins for inspiration as well. Hollins, a survivor of the shooting, made a full recovery and is having a productive fall. His seven rushing touchdowns pace the Cavaliers, and he's also caught a touchdown too.



"Uva Strong" is seen on the scoreboard at Scott Stadium prior to Saturday's game between Virginia and James Madison University. CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Hollins' three rushing touchdowns against No. 10 North Carolina on Oct. 21 propelled the Cavaliers to their best performance of the campaign, a thrilling 31-27 upset of the Tar Heels for UVA's first ever road win over a top-10 foe.

"We envisioned, we kept fighting," Hollins said that night. "This team is full of fighters, and there's no quit in this coaching staff or anywhere in the program, so it means a lot to a team that's been fighting."



UVA
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Sydney Shuler

They haven't stopped all season.

Hollins and kicker Will Bettridge are two players who held close relationships with Perry, a Miami native. Bettridge played high school football with Perry at Gulliver Prep in South Florida before the two reunited at UVA. Earlier this year, Hollins called Perry his "best friend."



And the Friday before the Cavaliers' Oct. 28 contest at Miami, the pair, Bettridge and Hollins, was part of a handful of Hoos who visited Perry's grave site. The next day, Bettridge put together a stellar effort while converting all four of his field-goal tries in a contest the Hurricanes ultimately won in overtime. Hollins scored two rushing touchdowns as he and Bettridge combined for all 26 points the Cavaliers scored in the game.

"It's always in the back of my head," Bettridge said afterward. "I think about it right [before] and that's what I've been telling myself [before] Jared [Rayman], and that's what I've been doing. It's been working, and if I can bring him with me and he's there with every kick, I'll continue to do that."



UVA
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During the offseason, Bettridge switched his number from No. 17 to No. 41, Perry's number. Freshman wide receiver Suderian Harrison chose to wear No. 1 upon arrival in honor of Davis because both Harrison and Davis played at Woodland High in South Carolina before starting their college careers with the Cavaliers. Bennett already was wearing the same No. 15 that Chandler wore.



All three jerseys with those numbers have a special patch on them, too, with the names of Davis, Perry, Chandler and the years they played for UVA. Elliott unveiled the patches before this latest season began in anticipation of the Cavaliers' opening contest against Tennessee and first game since the shooting.

Over the calendar year, there's been various steps Elliott's squad has taken to acclimate to the norms of a long season, such as their first spring practice, the spring game, the season opener and first home game. But his Hoos have never dreaded any of it.

They've been galvanized, regardless of outcome, by the mission of playing for Davis, Chandler and Perry, which won't change with only contests against Duke and Virginia Tech remaining.



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"They've been so inspiring to me just to see how resilient they are every single day," Elliott said, "Especially when there's so many, quote, unquote, 'easy outs.'"

"I could walk away. I could move on. I could say this is not my fight, this is not my problem,' but they show up every single day, and they respond every single day, and that's been a blessing to me. That's one of the things that I'm grateful for and thankful for is that I get to see them every single day and witness their resilience, and it inspires me just to do my part."

Greg Madia

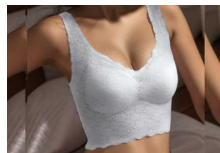
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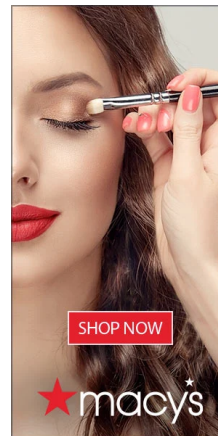
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