

The lacrosse stick

Campbell was never without it, from Garrison Middle School to Afghanistan



Sun photo by Algerina Perna, May 3, 2007

Nicholas Buaku, 12, holds a picture of his brother, Damion Campbell. He practices with Campbell's stick.

July 17, 2007

As a youngster, Damion Campbell and his lacrosse stick were inseparable. He took it everywhere in his Northwest Baltimore neighborhood - to the library, to the store and to Garrison Middle School. Once, he tried to sleep with it under his pillow.

He loved lacrosse that much.

"Damion carried that stick around like it was his buddy," said his aunt, Allison Robinson. "Once he picked it up, there was no putting it down.

"Sometimes I'd be driving home from work in my little red Honda and see him walking down Liberty Heights Avenue. He'd ask for a ride and I'd say, 'But Damion, where can we put that stick?' "

Usually, they drove off with the head of the lacrosse stick bobbing out of a rear window.

"Damion took very good care of his buddy," Robinson said.

Campbell played lacrosse at Forest Park High, where he earned a reputation as an indefatigable overachiever who would do anything for the sake of the team. In 1999, his junior year, the Foresters won nine of 10 games.

"Damion called plays, ran out shots and set picks," coach Robert Britt said. "If the team needed water at halftime, he'd run back to school and get a big jug for the guys."

Every game, his coach said, Campbell asked to cover the opponent's top scorer.

"He wanted all of the weight on his shoulders," Britt said. "He was tough, focused, reliable.

"I called him 'the little field general.' "

Two months after graduation, Campbell left his lacrosse stick behind and joined the Army. He became a medic. In August 2005, Campbell, a sergeant, was killed when a bomb detonated near his Humvee during an ambush in Khayr Kot, Afghanistan.

Campbell's possessions were returned to his family. When Donna Robinson opened her son's belongings, one item jumped out at her.

A lacrosse stick.

Where had Campbell picked it up?

"He didn't take it overseas with him," his mother said.

Even Campbell's Army buddies are stumped, said Bill Spray, a medic who roomed with him for two years overseas.

"He always talked about having played lacrosse," Spray said. "I remember him saying, 'I wish there was a team over here [on base].' But there wasn't."

When Campbell's possessions arrived, his younger brother claimed the Brine Ripper 6000 as his own.

Now Nicholas Buaku, 12, takes to the basement of the family's Northwest Baltimore home, stick in hand, and practices by bouncing lacrosse balls off the wall. And no one else is touching that stick.

"I'm afraid they might break it," Buaku said.

It's no surprise that Campbell's brother treasures the stick, Allison Robinson said.

"It's part of who his brother was."

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