

SPORTS



University of Iowa women's basketball commit Ava Jones poses Wednesday at Nickerson High School in Nickerson, Kan. Jones, along with her mother, father and younger brother were hit by an impaired driver July 5 on a Louisville sidewalk. The incident left her mother, Amy, with a brain injury and 21 broken bones. Ava's father Trey died a few days after the incident. Ava's younger brother, Creek, escaped serious injuries. Ava suffered a brain injury, a broken collarbone and two damaged knees. (Jim Slosiarek photos/The Gazette)

HEARTBREAK & HOPE



A photograph of University of Iowa women's basketball commit Ava Jones in a Hawkeye uniform is seen Wednesday at Jones' home in Nickerson, Kan.

Iowa basketball recruit Ava Jones has made steady progress after July incident left her severely injured

By Jeff Linder, The Gazette

NICKERSON, Kan. — Ava Jones opened the front door on a cold afternoon, the sun about to disappear beyond the horizon of the Kansas plains.

Her gray sweatpants covered two braced, damaged knees. An elite athlete needs her knees, and Jones needs both of hers rebuilt.

Her smile concealed mental trauma — and loss — that no 17-year-old should endure.

How are you doing, Ava? She shook her head and shrugged, "I'm doing OK."

Her mother, 42-year-old Amy Jones,

sat in a wheelchair in the kitchen. Same welcoming smile, despite a knee that aches constantly.

"They ask in the hospital, on a scale from 1 to 10, what's the level of your pain," Amy said. "With this knee, it's never below a 3. It always hurts."

The family's 1-year-old golden retriever, Paxton, watched from outside a sliding glass door as a 90-minute interview unfolded in the kitchen of this one-level house on the northeast corner of this town of 1,000. Brick on the outside, cozy and modern on the inside.

When the Jones family moved here a few years ago, they lived in a camper as Trey Jones — a wood-shop teacher, husband to Amy, father of three — began his work.

"He got our bedroom done first," Amy said. "Then we all moved from the

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IOWA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Clark's status 'day to day'

If All-American can't play, Davis is likely starter at point guard

By Jeff Linder, The Gazette

IOWA CITY — Molly Davis' role on the University of Iowa women's basketball roster is thus:

Backup to Caitlin Clark at point guard. A depth provider at off guard.

And a major insurance policy, just in case. The Hawkeyes have

reached a "just-in-case" juncture.

Clark aggravated a sprained left ankle on the final play of fourth-ranked Iowa's 84-83 loss at Kansas State on Thursday. According to a Friday email to The Gazette from UI sports information, Clark is "day-to-day, but the plan is a go" today, when the Hawkeyes (3-1) host Belmont (1-2).

Tipoff is 2 p.m. at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The Hawkeyes' se-

TODAY'S GAMES

• **Teams:** Belmont (1-2) at No. 4 Iowa (3-1)

• **Where:** Carver-Hawkeye Arena, Iowa City

• **Tipoff/Streaming:** 2 p.m./BTN+

• **Teams:** Columbia (3-1) at No. 7 Iowa State (3-0)

• **Where:** Hilton Coliseum,

Senior All-American point guard, Clark hurt her ankle about three minutes into the opener against

Ames
• **Tipoff/Streaming:** 11 a.m./ESPN+

• **Teams:** No. 20 Creighton (3-0) at Northern Iowa (2-1)

• **Where:** McLeod Center, Cedar Falls

• **Tipoff/Streaming:** 2 p.m./ESPN+

Southern University. "I just stepped on somebody's foot and turned my ankle a little



Iowa guard Caitlin Clark (22) is helped off the court by trainers at the end of Thursday's 84-83 loss at Kansas State. The Hawkeyes host Belmont today. (Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette)

bit," she said at the time. "I'll be perfectly fine. I'm all good." It wasn't all good

Thursday. Clark appeared to get all good. ► **IOWA, PAGE 6B**

Jones/Workouts have resumed

► FROM PAGE 3B

camper in there. Then he'd get another room done, then another, and we could spread out more."

Ava was asked what she missed most about her father. "My car needs a new spark plug. I wish he was here to put that in," she said. "I miss his cooking. He was a great cook. Steak, salmon ...

"Now I have to do the cooking."

She pointed to a wooden box on a shelf in the living room. Her father's resting place.

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On July 5, two days after Ava Jones committed to play women's basketball at the University of Iowa, the family was in Louisville, Ky. Her AAU team, Southwest Elite, was participating in the Run 4 Roses Classic.

Trey, Amy, Ava and 11-year-old Creek were near their downtown hotel, looking for a diner and a late supper at about 8 p.m.

A driver under the influence — he later admitted to having taken hydrocodone — collided with the family on the sidewalk.

According to the Drug Enforcement Association, hydrocodone is "a cough suppressant and a narcotic analgesic agent for the treatment of moderate to moderately severe pain."

Ironic, considering the severe pain it was about to inflict on the Jones family.

"We were offered to watch the video (of the incident), but were advised against it," Amy said.

That video showed 33-year-old Michael Hurley driving down West Market Street and running a red light at Third Street. From there, Hurley's car went through the intersection before jumping the curb and hitting the family of four.

Creek suffered some minor scrapes and spent one night in the hospital. Trey, Amy and Ava suffered massive injuries.

Iowa Coach Lisa Bluder was in Cincinnati on July 5.

"I was going to go to an (AAU) tournament there that day, then go down to watch Ava in Louisville," Bluder said. "I was in bed that night, it was probably 10 o'clock, and I got a call from (assistant coach) Abby Stamp, saying there had been an accident around 8.

"I was pretty naive. I texted Ava and told her to please call when she could."

Meanwhile, word began to spread back in central Kansas that the family was involved in something terrible.

"I was at work," said Lexi Allen, a friend of Ava. "I got a text from my teacher, 'Have you heard any updates on the Jones family?' Immediately, I texted her grandmother. I was freaking out."

Trey Jones died of his injuries three days later, on July 8. He was 42.

Amy was sedated for 13 days. She suffered 21 broken bones and a stroke, and estimates she has undergone "at least 15 surgeries."

"I know the doctors had to work very hard to keep me alive and save my leg," she said.

Ava suffered a brain injury, a broken collarbone and massive damage to both knees. She was sedated for 10 days.

Hospital personnel "had to tie my hands and my feet down," Ava said, because she had pulled out her catheter twice, pulled out her tracheotomy tube out twice, pulled out her feeding tube once.

As news spread, so did financial support.

Amy said a GoFundMe account had climbed over \$150,000. She mentioned some other funds. All told, well more than \$200,000 has been donated.

"People stepped up big-time for us," Amy said. "It's amazing how much people are supporting us. The cards, people telling us they're thinking of us.

"It's heartwarming. It keeps us going."



University of Iowa women's basketball commit Ava Jones (left) and friend Lexi Allen watch the Nickerson Panthers boys' basketball team practice Wednesday at the high school in Nickerson, Kan. Jones has come a long way since she was hit by an impaired driver in July in Louisville, along with her mother, father and younger brother. Ava, who suffered a brain injury, a broken collarbone and two damaged knees, is her "old" self again, Allen said, after being "hard to be around" at first. (Jim Slosiarek photos/The Gazette)



Amy Jones listens as her daughter, University of Iowa women's basketball commit Ava, talks about her recovery and future from her home in Nickerson, Kan.

Amy and Ava shared a room at Frazier Rehabilitation Institute in Louisville, then returned to Nickerson in August to get on with life, and to mourn.

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Ava Jones is 6-foot-2, slender and athletic. Coached by her father in track and field, she was a 5-foot-4 high jumper, winning a state championship in that event as a sophomore (she was the runner-up as a junior, clearing the same height).

She also was a state place-winner in the pole vault (10 feet, 6 inches) and javelin (123 feet). She could have taken the multisport track path, like her older brother, Hunter, a Division II all-American decathlete at Pittsburg State University.

Trey and Amy were married 21 years. They met at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kan. Both were exceptional track athletes; Trey also played basketball, Amy played volleyball.

"Dad gave me my work ethic in sports," Ava said.

She looked at Amy.

"Mom gave me my smarts."

Ava also played volleyball at Nickerson. But basketball was her route to a Division I scholarship. She averaged 20.8 points and 15.4 rebounds per game last season. ESPN ranked her as the No. 83 prospect in the Class of 2023.

Originally committed to Arizona State University, Ava reopened her recruitment after ASU Coach Charli Turner Thorne announced her retirement in March.

Bluder took note.

"We heard about her de-commitment, and we were looking for a 4 or 5," Bluder said. "I sent (Stamp) down to Texas in April, and she said,



A portrait of Trey Jones superimposed on a photo of the Nickerson High School track is displayed at the family home in Nickerson, Kan. Trey "gave me my work ethic," Ava Jones said.

"Oh, yes, she's the real deal."

"We had some Zoom calls, and we got her to visit in June. Some kids, you have that instant connection with, and she was one of those kids."

Ava remembers her visit to Iowa City.

"I loved the coaches and the players," she said. "I started the recruiting process with Abby. I really loved her. I got close to (assistant) Jan (Jensen)."

Ava committed July 3, two days before the tragedy in Louisville, which erased Ava's memory of her commitment.

She chose Iowa the second time around over Colorado, Kansas and others.

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National signing day was Nov. 7 and Ava Jones put pen to paper during an emotional ceremony at the high school. Her voice wavered as she thanked her father, her mother and many others.

The assistant superintendent for the Nickerson-South Hutchinson school district,

go. But once I can run again, that will be a starting point."

Ava is going through physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy, and drives herself to her sessions.

Now that her therapy is in Hutchinson (15 miles from Nickerson) instead of Wichita (60 miles), she is able to attend school five days a week, aiming to maintain her 4.0 GPA and her status as valedictorian of Nickerson's 68-member Class of 2023.

"I think I've come a long way with my speech," she said. "School is good. The only class that is really hard is Algebra III."

Those close to Ava see progress on a near-daily basis.

"At first, when she was back, she was hard to be around," said Allen, who routinely stops by the Jones house to bring her a variety of things — Chick-fil-A, and coloring books have been among the goodies lately. "She repeated the same things over and over.

"Now, you really don't notice anything different from the old Ava."

Ava has resumed workouts with her skills coach, Craig Nicholson.

"I've seen her twice since the accident, and she definitely made improvements from the first practice to the second," said Nicholson, who has worked with Ava for more than two years.

"She's able to do a little more with her hand-eye coordination. Her shot is coming along faster than I expected. Her muscle memory is coming back.

"She's frustrated, but before she got hurt, she got frustrated anyway. That's just the competitor in her."

Dylan Evans, AAU coach for Wheat State Elite and Southwest Elite, was one of the first to visit Ava in the hospital in Louisville. His role Thursday was as chauffeur for the two-hour trip to Manhattan for the Hawkeyes' game against Kansas State.

"It's going to get better for her, but it's never going to go away," Evans said. "This family, though, they work. Hunter, Ava ... Creek will be the same way. Ava is a strong-willed kid, and she gets it from her parents."

Basketball this season is out of the question. Next season at Iowa, highly unlikely.

"We're going to set our sights that she will play someday down the road," Bluder said. "If for some reason she can't, we'll deal with it."

Evans is betting Ava will. "I believe in Ava Jones, and I have from the first time she walked in the gym," he said. "If anybody can make it back, it's her."

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