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NEWTOWN

NEVER FORGET

Jon Lovorn honors Newtown with number change

By Ehsan Kassim | Staff Reporter

Twelve to 14 to 26.

That was the combination that tied the score at one in the 2014 CIAC DIII Hockey State Championship game.

For most players and its fans, those numbers would mean little. For the Newtown Nighthawks, their fans and an entire city, those numbers meant the world.

Two months later, everyone forgot about it. Five years later, it still means everything to us.

— Jon Lovorn

December 14, 2012 was the day of a deadly shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. On that day, gunman Adam Lanza murdered 26 people: 20 children and six adults.

Twelve to 14 to 26.

Jon Lovorn, a senior majoring in biology on a pre-med track and The University of Alabama Club Hockey team president, was on the state championship team and remembers that day clearly.

"All the numbers matched up," Lovorn said. "When they read it over the loudspeaker, everyone was jazzed up, it was a tie game going into the second period. Then they read the numbers and there was a sense of eerie silence in the rink. No one knew what to say or what to do. You just knew it wasn't a coincidence."

The Nighthawks went on to win the match, 2-1. It marked the first hockey state championship in school history.

Although he cannot remember who said it, Lovorn remembers a teammate remarked after the victory, "The team had 26 angels watching over us."

Lovorn, who had moved to Newtown just five months before the December shooting, did not play for the high school in his junior season. He played for the

Brewster Bulldogs, a junior league team in New York.

After the shooting, Lovorn decided to play his senior season with the Nighthawks.

"With everything that happened, I decided I wanted to play for my high school for my senior year and play with friends," he said.

Lovorn remembers the first day the students returned to school after the shooting, he saw his counselor, Ana Mendes, in the hallway, right by the public speaking center at Newtown High School.

Five months prior, Mendes had told Lovorn that "Newtown was the best place in the planet for him and he was going to love it."

On this day, she broke down and told Lovorn, "Welcome to Newtown, really sorry you have to be here."

Though he could have resented the memories of the city, Lovorn has instead embraced it all and wants to represent it as well as he can.

"The town had two choices; it was either going to fall into darkness or show people you can be different," Lovorn said. "That one act of violence doesn't have to define a whole town. One individual doesn't have to impact some 25,000 to 30,000 people that live in Newtown."

Flash forward to 2017 and Lovorn is still making sure he keeps the memories of what happened on 12/14 and the 26 people that died that day, close to him.

After wearing the No. 21 in his first three years at Alabama, Lovorn decided to switch to No. 26, for his senior season, to honor his adopted home.

Gail Lovorn, Jon Lovorn's mother, is proud her son is honoring the memories of what happened that day in their city. The reaction she has gotten from the Newtown citizens has

been encouraging.

"People responded on Facebook that this was such a positive and such a great thing for them," Gail said. "It gave them comfort that students that were still in high school at that time haven't forgotten and they are keeping the memories alive."

That is only the tip of the iceberg. Lovorn is also in the process of honoring his home city in a different way, in his final 26 games as a senior.

He wants to wear a sticker bearing the name of a victim for each of his remaining matches on his helmet, as a nod to the families and his city.

Lovorn wore the names of Charlotte Bacon and Olivia Engel on Oct. 27-28 against Canisius. He plans on wearing the names of Rachel Davino and Daniel Barden this weekend, as Alabama takes on rival Arkansas in Springdale, Arkansas.

That one act of violence doesn't have to define a whole town.

— Jon Lovorn

"He wants his senior year to be about Newtown," Gail said. "And he wants them to know that he hasn't forgotten them. His final 26 games will be dedicated to one of the 26 families."

Lovorn wrote a letter to then-President Barack Obama right after the attacks. His continued dedication to Newtown, just like his letter, is a means to try and find a solution, a solution to the mass shootings that he feels happen too often in the country.

Although he has not found the perfect solution yet, he feels that small acts of kindness, both to strangers and people you know, makes a larger impact than people realize.

Dec. 14, 2017 will mark the five-year anniversary of the deadly shooting. For the rest of the United States, it might just be another day. For the residents of Newtown, the day will always hold importance.

Pauline Fitzgerald, a senior journalism major at Alabama, is also from Newtown. She remembers a girl, a year older than her, on her father's shoulder, just leaning down with no energy, bawling her eyes out at the vigil the day of the shooting.

Fitzgerald only found out days later that the girl's mother was a librarian who was killed, while holding and protecting a kid from the shooting.

That memory is one that Fitzgerald said she can never forget. She and Jon Lovorn feel that with the all too often mass shootings that happen in the country today, people have already forgotten what happened at Newtown.

However, it is something that will continue to impact the city. And though it was a terrible day, they both feel a lot of good can still come from keeping those memories alive.

"Pray for Newtown" was big on Twitter right after the attacks," Lovorn said. "But two months later, everyone forgot about it. Five years later, it still means everything to us."

Twelve to 14 to 26.

Jon Lovorn will wear a sticker on his helmet with a different victim's name each game this season.

CW / Hannah Saad

