

COLLEGE BASKETBALL | N.C.A.A. MEN'S TOURNAMENT

On Eve of Tournament, Fourth Alabama Player Is Placed at Shooting

By BILLY WITZ

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A fatal January shooting that involved members of the top-ranked Alabama men's basketball team, which has loomed over the Crimson Tide as they chase a national championship, could have been even more deadly, as surveillance video showed that two players were in a car struck by bullets in the crossfire.

The shootout, which sent people nearby scrambling for cover, killed Jamea Harris, 23, who was a passenger in a car. In another car that was struck were Brandon Miller, a star player for the Crimson Tide, and Kai Spears, a freshman walk-on whose presence at the scene had not been previously reported.

Including Spears, at least four Alabama players have now been placed at the scene of the shooting that took place in the early morning hours of Jan. 15, as bars emptied out along The Strip, a popular gathering spot for students near campus along University Boulevard in Tuscaloosa.

Darius Miles, a now-former Alabama basketball player, is in Tuscaloosa County Jail on capital murder charges. He is accused of handing his gun to Michael Davis,



KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES



BRANDON SUMRALL/GETTY IMAGES

Darius Miles, above, is in jail on charges of capital murder. Brandon Miller, above left, is still a star player on the basketball team.

ing player award after Alabama Last week he called the shoot-

murder charges. He is accused of handing his gun to Michael Davis,

Bullets struck a car carrying two players, a video shows.

a childhood friend, who is also facing capital murder charges and has been accused of firing the bullet that killed Harris. Miles and Davis were indicted by a grand jury last week. A lawyer for Davis said that Davis had been acting in self-defense, while a lawyer for Miles said in a statement that evidence not seen by the grand jury showed that Miles was innocent.

Jaden Bradley, a freshman guard, was also at the scene. A review of surveillance video showed his car was in a narrow lane that intersects University Boulevard, parked ahead of Miller and Spears. Behind Miller and Spears was a Jeep with Harris in the front passenger seat.

The video showed Davis approaching the Jeep from behind, along the driver's side. Soon, flashes from gunshots could be seen entering and exiting the Jeep. After several shots were exchanged, Davis appeared to have been hit and staggered backward into a telephone pole. He regained his balance and circled in front of

Susan C. Beachy contributed research.



CHARITY RACHELLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The deadly shooting took place in the early morning hours of Jan. 15 as bars were emptying on The Strip, above in 2021, a popular gathering spot for students near the campus in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Bradley's car while continuing to fire at the Jeep. Two bullets struck the windshield of Miller's car. Neither struck Miller or Spears.

"I'm sorry, I'm not going to be able to speak about that," said Spears, a freshman who has not played this season and who is the son of Marshall University's athletic director, Christian Spears. Kai Spears briefly spoke Wednesday in the locker room Alabama was using for practice ahead of its first-round N.C.A.A. tournament game against Texas A&M-Corpus Christi on Thursday. Miller also declined to comment.

In its aftermath, the school has sought to distance itself from the shooting. Miles was dismissed from the team and kicked out of school within hours of his arrest, and the involvement of other players — of which the school was aware — was kept quiet as the Crimson Tide established them-

selves as the toast of the Southeastern Conference and one of the best teams in the country.

Alabama athletic officials did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment on Wednesday.

On Feb. 21, a police detective testified at a pretrial hearing about the presence of Miller and Bradley at the scene. He said that Miles had texted Miller, telling him to pick him up and that "I need my joint," referring to Miles's gun, which he had left in the back seat of Miller's car.

The detective also made note of an unidentified passenger in Miller's car. A person familiar with the case identified that person as Spears. That person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters in the case.

Alabama has been criticized for continuing to play Miller, a decision that Athletic Director Greg

Byrne told ESPN had been made in conjunction with the university's president, Stuart R. Bell. Initially, Alabama Coach Nate Oats characterized Miller's involvement as "wrong spot at the wrong time" before apologizing for that description.

Another apology ensued when Miller continued what had been a ritual during introductions at home games: holding his arms out while a teammate patted him down, as if he were being searched for a weapon.

Miller, a 6-foot-8 forward who will likely be among the top picks in the N.B.A. draft, has become a lightning rod since his presence during the shooting became public. He has played exceedingly well, scoring 41 points in an overtime win at South Carolina in his first game after the pretrial hearing. And Miller was awarded the SEC tournament's most outstand-

ing player award after Alabama won the title on Sunday in Nashville, near where he grew up.

He has excelled despite being heckled with chants of "lock him up" by South Carolina fans and "Brandon Killer" by Vanderbilt fans during the conference tournament.

Miller arrived at a news conference on Wednesday accompanied by an armed guard.

"If you guys saw some of what I've seen sent his way, I think you would understand why that's the case," said Oats, who indicated that Miller had received anonymous email threats, but declined to elaborate.

A pair of Alabama fans showed up to the Southeastern Conference tournament semifinals on Saturday wearing customized T-shirts that turned heads — and a few stomachs.

On the back, the shirts read: "Killin' our way through the SEC in '23."

The T-shirt was deemed in such poor taste that the SEC said that any fans wearing it would be prohibited from entering the arena for Sunday's game. A conference spokesman said afterward that security officials had not spotted anyone wearing the T-shirts.

"It's meant to make you think," said the man, who identified himself as Jimmy Johnson, from Mobile, Ala., on Saturday. The man, whose real name is Jason O'Rear, hung up without answering questions on Wednesday when he was contacted by the Times.

Last week he called the shooting a tragedy but said that Oats and Miller were being unfairly attacked, using an expletive. "The media is going to cancel Miller," he said. "Now, I don't condone anything about what happened, but I know where the media is going to come crashing down and try to ruin a guy's career. I know where the clicks are."

He was asked if he would feel differently if his daughter had been killed.

"I don't know," he said.

In Tuscaloosa, most of the bars along The Strip have been closed this week and the campus is all but vacant as most students have left town for spring break. Few who remain seem willing to discuss the shooting or the university's response to it.

"Jamea Harris should be living her life and raising her son," said Walt Maddox, the mayor of Tuscaloosa. "Her murder, as with every senseless act of violence, weighs on all of us. Our words are inadequate to provide comfort to her family; however, our actions matter to ensure justice."

But in a surveillance video, when Davis hobbles toward a parking lot — after firing at least eight bullets and taking one in the shoulder — Bradley, the freshman from Rochester, N.Y., peels out.

As Miller follows after them, the Jeep, with the mortally wounded Harris, sideswipes Miller and Spears, one bullet-riddled car screaming past another in a tragedy that could have been worse.