

Alton area mourns loss of young Romell Jones

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - The mood was somber on this cold Tuesday morning at a memorial site for the 11-year-old Alton boy, **Romell L. Jones**, who was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting on Monday night.

Those at the memorial site, only a few steps from where he was shot and killed, said the young man and multiple other kids were waiting for transportation after being at the **Alton Housing Authority Recreation Center** in **Alton Acres**. Jones was shot waiting in the parking lot of the recreation center.

Nasser Perry, a sixth-grader in the **Alton School District**, used his own money to purchase an enormous teddy bear at an Alton Dollar General that he placed with respect at the memorial site he was helping to create. He stood mostly in silence, stunned by what had happened to his friend only a few hours before, just inches from where he was then standing.

“I sat next to him about 3 o’clock yesterday on a computer and played,” Perry said. “It is so sad this happened. I have never had anything like this ever happen before in my life.”

Perry said he and Romell were good friends and that Romell loved to play basketball and always had a ball in his hands. Perry said he didn’t remember exactly what his friend’s final words to him were, but he said he was perfectly “happy” playing on the computer on Monday afternoon.

Demetric Jennings spent a considerable amount of time during his childhood in the Alton Acres area and today tries to be a positive influence on the children. He said he was walking toward the recreation center when the fatal shots were fired.

He agreed with Perry that Jones had an adoration of basketball and was “extremely talented.”



“I feel it is a shame to see a life taken, it is that simple,” Jennings said. “The unnecessary violence with guns needs to stop. This young man just had his life taken from his loving mother.”

Jennings said Jones was innocently waiting for a ride to basketball practice when the gunfire erupted. Jennings said he heard shots ring out as he was walking toward the center and he immediately ran up to try to help.

“Now because this happened, this young man can’t live out the rest of his life,” Jennings said. “We have to do something to remember him and keep his memory alive and try to prevent these kinds of things from happening.”

Bobby Everage, an Alton Middle School coach, was a standout Alton High football, basketball and track athlete and now coaches the middle school players. He likely would have worked with the young man who was shot and killed because of his love of basketball.

“He was in fifth grade at Gilson-Brown and he probably would have been one of my athletes,” Everage said. “I think he would have come out for both football and basketball. I know he loved basketball and I saw him playing before in Alton Acres. I stop sometimes and watch the kids play, just to know I am around. This young man’s life was cut short and he had so much potential. I know he was a good kid and has a lot of friends. When life ends that way, it is so sad.”



It is no secret that Romell was loved by many and will be missed dearly.

"Our entire school community is devastated by the loss of Ronnell," said Kristie Baumgartner, assistant superintendent at Alton School District. "Our thoughts, prayers and condolences are with his family during this time of tremendous grief and mourning."

"Social workers and staff were available throughout the day on Tuesday at Gilson Brown Elementary to work with students experiencing grief or to answer questions in a sensitive manner," she said. "The team will remain at the school throughout this week and as determined by need."

Romell's teacher, Paul Berghoff, says that he was very well liked by teachers and his classmates.

"He was happy, sensitive and an excellent student," said Berghoff. "As a fifth grader, he mentored younger students at our school."

Bubba Lacey is a maintenance worker for Alton Housing Authority and was at the scene on Tuesday morning where the vicious crime had occurred the night before. He said the loss of this young man "really just hit home."

"I do a lot with the kids and I am around them a lot," Lacey said. "This whole thing has made me sick."



A basketball court behind the recreation center in Alton Acres was cold and vacant today. The young man will never grace the courts again because of the senseless shooting, Lacey said.

Alton Athletic Director Jeff Alderman announced today that out of respect of the family, the Alton vs East St. Louis boys basketball game scheduled for this evening has been postponed.

"This young man lived to play basketball," Lacey said. "He had a good future ahead and was such a nice young man. I saw him last week and he said to me, 'how are you Mr. Lacey?' I said I am doing well and he said he was the same."

In his truck, Bubba Lacey pointed in a direction away from the vehicle and said something profound that others in the Alton Acres area are likely thinking today: “My grandson lives just around the corner. It could have been him that was shot as easy as this young man.”



[A GoFundMe Page has been set up to help in the burial and funeral expenses.](#)

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