

Brandin Echols helped make Gator Bowl even more special for one Kentucky family



by Larry Vaught

Ally Echols grew up a Kentucky fan in Shepherdsville and met her husband, Thomas Paine Echols, a few months before he graduated high school there.

Tom Echols, who was a year older, was from a military family. His father was in the Coast Guard and he had numerous other family members who had been in the military. His older brother joined the Marines when he graduated high school and Tom did the same in 2004. "He was a military brat and was always interested in the military and knew that's what he wanted to do," Ally Echols said.

She graduated in 2005

when Tom, a Michigan native who moved to Kentucky at age 10, was on his first tour in Iraq. He came home in October of 2005 and they were married. He got orders to return to Iraq in 2006 and deployed in September. She found out a week before his deployment she was pregnant with their daughter, Julia. However, he died Dec. 4, 2006, about five months before Julia was born.

"It was kind of ironic her birth ended up being the day his unit got home from Iraq," Ally said. "Tom was in Ramadi, one of the world's most dangerous cities in 2006. If Tom had to go, that's how he would have wanted it. He loved being in the Marines. They (other Marines with him) were his best friends. He would not have wanted to go any other way."

Ally Echols now lives in Elizabethtown — a block away from her sister and her children — and was running on a treadmill one day when Kentucky was playing football on TV. That's the first time she heard the name Brandin Echols, a UK corner-

back.

"I was more focused on running and breathing but thought, 'Did I just hear my name?' Echols is not a common name. I looked it up and it was so cool to hear your last name said correctly on national TV and he turned out to be such a crucial player," Alyson Echols said.

Several family members and friends have memory bracelets honoring her husband. Some had broken and she was ordering more recently when her daughter, Julia, suggested sending one to Brandin Echols.

"I did some research to see if we could get one to him," Alyson Echols said.

She reached out to Susan Lax, director of athletic communications and public relations for UK football. Within 24 hours, she heard back from Lax.

"She gave me her personal information, so it was pretty easy to get the bracelet to Brandin," Alyson Echols said.

Ally was watching the Gator Bowl on what would have been her husband's 35th birthday with his sister when

Brandin Echols flopped to help draw a personal foul penalty on North Carolina State. She loved it.

"Tom's sister and I laughed until we cried when he got pushed and flopped," Alyson said. That was something Tom would have done. He was a goofball just like that. We were hysterical."

Brandin Echols made it clear before the game he was honored to be wearing the memorial bracelet of Tom Echols.

"I want to thank Thomas Paine Echols and his family for allowing me to support him and wear his wristband. It's a big honor," the UK cornerback said.

It was also a gesture that Ally Echols and her family will never forget.

"Any opportunity I get to where people can learn about him and his name, I'll do it. That's how you keep people alive. Just tell their story," Ally Echols said. "These men were husbands, fathers. Any chance I get to share Tom's story, I will. I'm just so appreciative UK and Brandin were willing to do this for us."



Ally Echols with her husband, Tom, before he was deployed. He was killed in Iraq in 2006.

Dontaie Allen has given Kentucky fans hope for this season with his play in recent games



Dontaie Allen gives fans hope

Recently Kentucky coach John Calipari tried to compare the emergence of Dontaie Allen to former UK stars Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Immanuel Quickley because they both did not emerge as stand-out players until the middle of the season.

However, the comparison is not quite the same. Gilgeous-Alexander started just two of UK's first 15 games his freshman season before becoming the starting point guard, earned SEC Tournament MVP honors and being picked 11th in the 2018 NBA Draft.

Quickley also started just five of UK's first 15 games last year. But like Gilgeous-Alexander, he played in every game he did not start. Plus he had played extensively as a freshman. Quickly blossomed into the SEC Player of the Year and became the 25th pick in the NBA draft a few months ago.

Calipari cited the patience both Quickley and Gilgeous-Alexander had before they became stars. Allen could not play last year due to injuries but played just 20 minutes

in UK's first seven games before getting 23 points at Mississippi State, 14 against Vanderbilt and six points against Florida. He's 11-for-16 from 3-point range in the three SEC wins.

"I think he has given us hope with this team," Keaton Belcher, Allen's high school coach at Pendleton County, said. "We don't know what might happen the rest of the year. COVID could wipe it out. Games get bigger and more exciting."

"Dontaie has become a fan favorite not only in Kentucky, but nationally. What he has done has been super for the whole state, but especially Pendleton Countians."

Belcher knows many questioned Allen's ability because of the level of competition Pendleton County played. He didn't have an elite national schedule like prep teams play.

"But our schedule was not bad. We played in Marshall County Hoopfest. We traveled a lot to play teams in different regions," Belcher said. "Him scoring a lot in college

is not surprising to me but it probably is to an average fan for him to do it at this level. But he can shoot. Always could and always will be able to do that."

Allen is not going to blossom into a first-round draft pick this year like Gilgeous-Alexander and Quickley did but he's doing what he can to take advantage of his extended playing time.

"He's a much more well rounded in the game of basketball than people think," Belcher said. "I'm just glad people have been getting a chance to see that."

He's also intensely loyal. Team-mate Brandon Boston was booed during UK's win over Vanderbilt when he missed a shot.

"I don't like that. That's my teammate. That's my brother. At the end of the day, I'm always going to have his back. I feel like everyone in BBN, everyone should be there for him and support him during this time because when he's doing good, I think people are going to switch and they're going to be supporting him," Allen said.

A Poetic History of American Wars

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two,
Columbus and his daring crew;
Sailed across the briney sea,
Discovered this land of liberty.

Then our forefathers of the Pilgrim stock,
Landed at the Plymouth Rock;
Started there a colony,
Because they wanted to be free.

But the British King would not agree,
For these his subjects to be free;
Until George Washington and thousands more,
Drove the British from our shore.
They risked their lives that this might be,
A country for the noble free.

Again we were called to defend ourselves,
They called to the War of Eighteen and Twelve,
They fought with hearts so brave and true,
That freedom's flag might wave red, white and blue.

Then came the war between the states,
To decide the poor black man's fate;
Whether he should still remain a slave,
Or lie in a noble free man's grave.
But then as now God's will was done,
The right will always overcome.

Then for a while, peace did reign,
Until we had the war with Spain;
Again American courage stood firm and true,
Freedom's flag still waves red, white and blue.

Then came that awful German war,
That took our boys from home so far;
And broke so many a parent's heart,
When from their son they had to part.
They shed their blood that this might be,
A country for the noble free.

It seems their blood was shed in vain,
For the enemy now has struck again;
And threatens to invade our shore,
Destroy our peace forevermore.

Tis because we have wandered from the fold,
Sought after women, wine and gold;
And neglected to fear the living God,
Who placed us on this noble sod.

Now we all have our job to do,
The soldier, farmer, and laborer too;
If we're to gain a victory,
And save this land of liberty.

Let all who believe in God just bow,
Ask for His help and guidance now;
Then please God when the victory's won,
Give the glory to God and His Dear Son.

God alone knows what the end will be,
For these lines were written in forty-three;
Now I add these afterthoughts,
For they continue on with their astronauts.

I fear that advocating birth-control, See Genesis 38:1-10
And meddling with the moon;
Will bring some great disaster,
To this nation very soon.

For what the Bible says,
I can freely tell;
It says all wicked nations,
Shall be turned into hell.

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Psalm 9:17

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34

Elder W.A. Crowe, July 10, 1982

VX Nerve Agent Destruction Begins at Blue Grass Depot

The first munitions containing VX nerve agent were destroyed at the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) Jan. 10. This marks the third of five munition destruction campaigns to begin at the Blue Grass Army Depot.

"It has been 12 years since VX nerve agent has been destroyed in the United States chemical weapons stockpile," said Dr. Candace Coyle, site project manager, BGCAPP. "This achievement is a tribute to the hard work, dedication and teamwork across the mission - from employees, partner organizations, community members and advisory groups, especially during a global pandemic."

"This milestone marks another significant step in the total elimination of nerve agent at the Blue Grass Army Depot," said Col. Stephen Dorris, depot commander. "I am

confident that all safety and environmental compliance measures will be adhered to as professionals all work in tandem to successfully continue the mission, helping rid our nation and the world of these toxic, life-threatening agents from our past."

The plant will destroy 155mm projectiles containing VX nerve agent through a process called neutralization. Automated equipment takes the munitions apart and drains the chemical agent. The agent is mixed with water and caustic to produce hydrolysate. The hydrolysate is tested by an on-site laboratory to confirm agent destruction. Remaining metal parts from the munitions are thermally heated to more than 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy any residual chemical agent and then are safely recycled.