

# Father of Deceased UA Baseball Player Says Son Died After Being Pressured by Coaches to Get COVID-19 Vaccine

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*The family of a University of Alabama baseball player who passed away after being pressured into getting the COVID-19 vaccine is raising awareness and helping young athletes succeed.*

**Davis James Heller** was only 22 years old and had a promising baseball career ahead of him when he suddenly passed away from a cardiac episode on Oct. 5, 2022.

His family described Heller as “fiercely passionate about everything he did,” especially baseball.

His father, DJ Heller, told 1819 News his son did not want to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Heller presented a fake vaccination card the first year. But when it was time for a second vaccination, DJ Heller said his son felt guilty despite having a pre-existing condition.

“Davis was very much of a conscientious, good kid. He didn’t do anything wrong and didn’t like to get in trouble,” DJ Heller said.

The university said there were never any official vaccine mandates in any UA sport.

“No student-athletes at The University of Alabama were ever required to be vaccinated against COVID,” the university said in response to an 1819 News inquiry. “To state otherwise is false.”

However, Heller told his parents that coaches told the team it was selfish not to get vaccinated. Without the shot, players were not allowed to go out to eat on road trips or eat in the dining hall, Heller told his parents. They also had to be tested for COVID twice a week and quarantined for five days after every contact trace, according to Heller.

He told his parents the coaches strongly advised them to get the shot if they planned to play ball. Even though he had a medical exemption from a doctor, Heller did not want to let anyone down.

“So, when he got there in the second year and was told he would not be able to go into a locker room or a training room, he knew he would basically be isolated,” DJ Heller said. “Now looking back on it, he reluctantly decided to get it. He was completely distraught about it and towards the end of that year, he didn’t get a whole lot of opportunities.”

Davis Heller's teammate Jim Jarvis spoke to 1819 News about his friend and his own experience feeling pressured to get the vaccine.

The pair became fast friends when they played in the same San Diego league. Jarvis said Heller was an amazing player, and even though they were on opposing teams, he was respectful.

"His first 'at bat,' he's just like crushing line drives everywhere and obviously, he's an impressive figure just because he's so tall," Jarvis remembered. "Usually people in baseball, there is a stereotype where if they're playing really well they have pretty big egos."

"But my first conversation with Davis, he was actually super friendly and open," he said. "You could tell he was really a nice person and it wasn't an act or anything."

Jarvis said he also felt pressure to get the vaccine. He believes Heller took the chance and got vaccinated because he loved his team.

"There were like different guidelines if you didn't get the vaccine and those guidelines came off as very, very strict," said Jarvis. "It was to a point where you got the feeling that if you didn't get the vaccine, you, like, basically were going to be kind of excluded from the rest of the team."

"You were basically told that without getting the vaccine, you were hurting the team," he continued. "And again, knowing Davis would do anything to help the team, that messaging is probably what struck him. He didn't want to do anything that would come across as selfish or anything that would hurt his friends."

Davis Heller continued to play ball and eventually transferred to North Greenville University.

His father said his son was very good at overcoming challenges.

"He was born with a cleft lip and had multiple surgeries," DJ Heller remembered. "He was always having to overcome something."

The 6-foot, 8-inch pitcher initially signed with Oklahoma after his junior year in high school. He suffered from "yips," a sudden and unexplained condition that impacts a player's abilities, but his father said he still didn't give up.

"He was supposed to get drafted really high and all of a sudden, one day, he just couldn't throw the baseball," DJ Heller said. "And he didn't quit."

While still in high school, Davis Heller was treated for pericarditis. Years before going to college, he was given a clean bill of health. His dad said tests showed there were no longer any issues with his heart.

However, when he passed away nine months after receiving the vaccine, an autopsy showed his heart was double in size and was severely damaged.

"I remember talking the night before he was studying for a test," Heller remembered of his child's final hours. "He got up the next morning and had just showered and was sitting on the couch and he was gone. Just his heart gave out."

“It was damaged to the point that they thought it was like a 70-year-old man’s heart who smoked his whole life,” he said. “But he never did any of that stuff. He was healthy.”

“You know, it’s pretty obvious to me what it was,” he continued.

DJ Heller believes the COVID-19 vaccine contributed to his son’s death, and he wants to spread awareness.

“I’m not looking for any money or a lawsuit and none of that’s going to bring my son back,” he told 1819 News. “So, this is just probably more so exposure and information as to what happened and the tragedy and the travesty of the decision-making that went on.”

Heller played under Coach Brad Bohannon, who left [amid a gambling controversy](#). Rob Vaughn was named head coach in 2023.

The Heller family wants Heller to be remembered for being an excellent team member and friend.

“I think everybody that ever came in contact with Davis would say he was their best friend,” DJ Heller said. “He was faith-based. He was always there for anybody in need. He worked really hard. He loved his family.”

“He was a perfect son,” he added. “He did everything right, and it’s too bad because the world needs good people, and he’s not here. That’s hard.”

“He’s like the most selfless person I’ve ever met. He just puts everyone else in front of him,” Jarvis added. “He’s constantly checking in and he just genuinely cared about everyone that he knew and had a relationship with.”

The Davis Heller Memorial Foundation was established to continue Davis Heller’s legacy. The organization offers financial opportunities to players who value being a team player.

DJ Heller went public on the [America Out Loud Pulse podcast](#) with Dr. Mary Talley Bowden. Bowden is the founder of [Americans for Health Freedom](#).

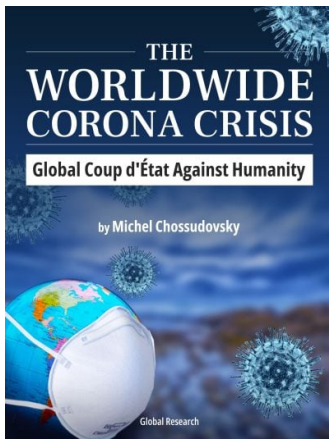
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