

Show of Support
“You gain strength from speaking out,” says Devereaux Peters (far left) with fellow athletes (clockwise) DeAndre’ Bemby, Stedman Bailey and Diontae Spencer.

Professional Athletes, Gun Violence Survivors

FOREVER CHANGED

FOUR SPORTS STARS REVEAL THE HORRIFIC MOMENTS WHEN GUNFIRE ALTERED THEIR LIVES—AND HOW THEY’RE WORKING TO STOP THE SHOOTINGS

By ELAINE ARADILLAS



Nearly 40,000 Americans are killed with guns every year in America—and approximately 85,000 more are shot and wounded, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the impact can be even more wide-reaching. In a 2018 national survey more than half of respondents—58 percent—said they had been touched by gun violence in some way, whether it is from a bullet piercing their own flesh or from one hitting a family member, friend or partner. Recently four professional athletes—Devereaux Peters, a now-retired WNBA forward; DeAndre' Bembry, shooting guard for the NBA's Toronto Raptors; Stedman Bailey, a former wide receiver for the NFL's Los Angeles Rams; and Diontae Spencer, an NFL wide receiver for the Denver Broncos—sat down for an intimate virtual conversation about their personal experiences with gun violence, and how it has irrevocably changed their lives. The roundtable event, a partnership between *People* and the nonprofit advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety (everytown.org), marks this year's National Gun Violence Survivors Week, Monday, Feb. 1, through Sunday, Feb. 7. The athletes are all members of the Everytown Athletic Council, cofounded by Peters, whose beloved cousin was shot to death in 2013. "As athletes, we're blessed to have a platform," she says. "It's empowering to know you're not alone." That's a sentiment shared by the group's other members. "I'm a walking miracle, and

I don't take that for granted," says Bailey, whose career was cut short after he was shot in the head in 2015 while sitting in a car on a Miami street. "When I share my story, it gives other people hope."



Scan this QR code with your phone's camera to watch *People* Features: Gun Violence Survivor Athletes on *People*TV.



DEVEREAUX PETERS, 31
Minnesota Lynx (retired)

'My cousin was shot in the back'

We were close. JoJo was a big basketball player and my biggest fan. He had been home in Baltimore during a home invasion and had been brutally beaten; it was very traumatic... so on this particular day [in May 2013] JoJo was hanging out with friends at their home when some associates of those friends came over to rob them. He had such a bad experience from the home invasion, he just wanted to get out.... He got up to leave, and they shot him in the back and killed him. He was 20 years old. My family was devastated. There's this constant healing process, dealing with it every single day; it does not go away. And [when another shooting happens] it's terrible watching that over and over again, knowing firsthand how that feels. We see so much gun violence that you can almost become numb to it; it's all around us. But as overwhelming as it can seem, it's something that we individually can help change.



A Life Lost, a Voice Found
"We had a connection," says Peters (inset, at a 2019 event) of JoJo (above). "Part of the responsibility with being an athlete is using your voice to do better."



Brotherly Love
"He wanted to be mayor," says Bembry of his college student brother Adrian. (Inset: Bembry, left, with Adrian).

DEANDRE' BEMBRY, 26
Toronto Raptors

'I think about my brother every day'

Our family is really close, and my brother [Adrian Potts, 20] wanted to be a lawyer. He was going down that road. It was a week before the 2016 NBA Draft, and I'd done eight workouts [with various teams], and I walked in, and my mom was talking on the phone, and I could hear it through her tone.... My brother was at a party; he was trying to break up a fight, and he got shot. He passed, and I canceled the rest of my workouts. [A week later Bembry was drafted in the first round.] Me, my mom and my grandmother broke down crying. I wore number 95, the year Adrian was born. There's not one minute I don't think about my brother... it's every minute of the day.



Voices United

A virtual discussion of pain—and purpose

People staff writer Elaine Aradillas (top left) served as moderator for an emotional talk on Jan. 19 with athletes (clockwise from top center) Devereaux Peters, Diontae Spencer, DeAndre' Bembry and Stedman Bailey. All part of the Everytown Athletic Council, the sports stars joined together for the first time to share personal stories of loss but also to talk about the ways they are working to end gun



violence. "I know there's so much more work to be done," says Bailey. "I look forward to continuing to do the work.... And with my fellow council members here, we could do some really good things."



DIONTAE SPENCER, 28
Denver Broncos

‘Someone I knew shot my dad’

It was the middle of the day [Sept. 23, 2010] in my hometown of New Iberia, La., and my dad [Clifton “Cliff” Williams] was in his barbershop when four guys came in to rob him, and they ended up shooting my dad and killing him. The guy that shot him, I knew him growing up, playing basketball and stuff. You have to decide if you are going to be angry or try to change things. What brings me hope is talking about my loss, letting kids know what I went through. We can’t save the whole world, but if we can reach one kid, that might change everything for that child.



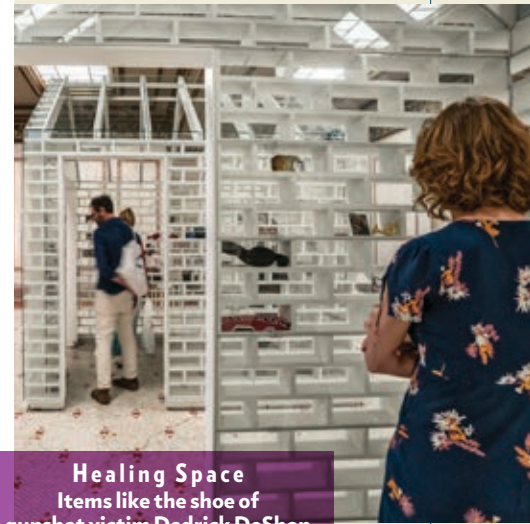
Broken Bond
“Losing him was a shock,” says Spencer (top, as a wide receiver for the Broncos and inset, at his high school graduation with his dad).

STEDMAN BAILEY, 30
Los Angeles Rams (retired)

‘I was shot twice in the head’

I was visiting my family in Miami on Nov. 24, 2015; it was a normal day. I was in the car with my two little cousins and their father, we were going out to dinner, and I noticed a car pull up in the middle of the street. A minute later I just started hearing shots ring out—we were in the middle of it, bullets everywhere. There were more than 30 bullets sprayed all over the car. My two little cousins’ father, he laid on top of the kids and was struck 11 times, but by the grace of God he’s still living today. I was shot twice in the head...my skull over my eyebrow was shattered, I had a traumatic brain injury, and I have a metal plate in my head. I have a portion of my brain that doesn’t work. I have to deal with seizures. And depression is something that I struggle with, as well as anxiety—these are all things that I never dealt with before. That ended my football career and left a permanent scar on my life. I have to take pills to keep my seizures in check, pills for depression too, and that stuff really sucks. I’m only 30 years old, but...things could be worse. It should soften the hearts of the people who will get to hear me to know that this happens to real people, and there are real consequences. And not just for myself but for so many people around me that love me. It leaves scars on us all.

Focus & Determination
“People I grew up with lost their lives to guns,” says Bailey. “They’re not here to share their story. I want to stand for them, people who are voiceless now.”



Healing Space
Items like the shoe of gunshot victim Dedrick DeShon Earl (below) line shelves (above).



What They Left Behind

A new museum installation honors gun-violence victims

For every one of the thousands of lives ended by bullets every year in America, there are loved ones left grieving a now-empty place in their homes and hearts. Now that loss is being recognized in the Gun Violence Memorial Project, a collection of mementos—and the stories behind them—from people killed by guns. The exhibit, a partnership between Everytown and the architectural firm MASS Design group at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., is currently scheduled to open in March for in-person viewing and can be seen virtually at gunviolencememorialproject.org.