

BULLDOGS-EXTRA

After life on the move, Jamaal Jarrett and family find home with Georgia football

**McClain Baxley**

Athens Banner-Herald

Published 7:13 a.m. ET July 21, 2022 | Updated 12:06 p.m. ET July 21, 2022

GREENSBORO, NC — Jamaal Jarrett is ready to announce that he's going to play college football at Georgia, but he's waiting for his teammates to join him for this special moment. He has his sister Jaada to his right, mother Trisha Brown to his left and stepfather Tim Wright is at the end of the table that's covered with Jarrett's middle school jerseys, Grimsley High School helmets and three ball caps representing Auburn, Georgia and North Carolina. He waits as the last of his teammates stand behind him, in front of an army of media members, fans, friends, community members and coaches.

When the last high school boy gets into place, Jarrett, the 6-foot-6, 350-pound four-star defensive lineman, looks to both sides before thanking everyone in attendance for being there and for helping him along the way. He's talking quickly because he's nervously excited. His sister and stepfather are wearing sunglasses to block out the sun.

It's Jarrett's 17th birthday and undeniably hot, with the North Carolinian July sun beating down on the onlookers backs while Jarrett uses a white Gatorade towel to wipe away the sweat from his face.

Moments later, despite 90-degree weather, Jarrett is sporting a thick letterman jacket with patches boasting the Georgia football program — the national championships, the Bulldog logos, different script fonts on the sleeves. He smiles with relief as he fields questions from men behind tv cameras.

Then a question shifts to his parents: “Mom, dad: what do you think?”

Brown leans forward, still gleaming from ear to ear and answers.

“We think it’s a good decision,” Brown said in the impromptu press conference. “There are a lot of colleges and universities that offer great programs. Mack Brown is a Hall of Famer and it was hard to make that type of decision, but when you meet, grow and build rapport with people and the development of the players, Georgia is where it’s at.”

2023 UGA commits: What to know about Jamaal Jarrett and the rest of the 2023 UGA football recruiting class

Read more: How Georgia football moves on after top RB prospect Justice Haynes commits to Alabama

Good month of June: Georgia football had an overall good month of June on the recruiting front. Here’s why

In the next hour, Brown stands by the table and watches as her son poses for photos with friends, coaches, teammates. She makes sure that nobody is left behind, calling for Jamaal to take a picture with another fan. She’s changed into a black t-shirt with a big Georgia Bulldog logo. She thinks about the past several years of recruiting, the joys of meeting coaches and other parents along the way.

She then joins her husband who is talking with a reporter about Jamaal’s commitment.

“(Georgia) really made an impression on me and I feel comfortable leaving him there. They’re going to take good care of him,” Wright said. “I want him to have as many birthdays just like this one.”

Jamaal Jarrett on relationships forged in new home

Brown and Jarrett are close. The two moved around a good bit, most recently in 2014 from Arizona to Greensboro to help out Brown’s mother. That December she took her son Christmas caroling, looking to carry on the tradition of spreading the holiday spirit to

neighbors. Brown, wearing Vans and a sweater, went down the street and knocked on the door ready to sing.

No one came to the door.

Disappointed and a bit confused, she and her son, Jamaal Jarrett, returned home and her mom informed them why there wasn't much response to her singing.

"I didn't know we were in the hood," Brown said. "My mom says, 'this is the hood. They don't do that here.' We didn't know that at all."

Fitting in was an adjustment. They weren't used to the way things moved in Greensboro. The food wasn't the same, people dressed differently, there was a bit of an uptightness about. Some of the lingo is something that even eight years later Brown is still learning.

"I didn't know what Felecia was," Brown said. "I was like who's Felecia? Bye Felecia? I didn't know what that meant."

Still through the difficulty of a new area and a new life, their family remained close. So when the time came for Jarrett to make a decision about where he was going to play college football, the biggest weight was on his mother. He knew she would help him make the best move. She knew him better than any coach or teammate.

"My mom is my biggest supporter," Jarrett said. "My day one. She really helped me down the line and she felt like Georgia was the best for me."

Jarrett didn't start playing football until several years after moving to Greensboro. In Arizona, he excelled in playing soccer and a little bit of basketball. Soccer was what the kids did out west, Brown explained.

It wasn't until middle school when Jarrett was introduced to football.

"I was always big, but my first loves were soccer and basketball," Jarrett said. "I tried out football, fell in love with that as well and stuck with it. It's brought me here."

Wright, who also played football in grade school, takes some credit for helping his 6-foot-6 stepson enjoy the game.

“When I first met him, we played basketball a lot,” Wright said. “Later in his middle school years he started going to football. I started teaching him things that I did when I played football. We got him a football and he loved it. He played for his middle school teams and he ran with it.”

Even with his size and quickness, Jarrett’s recruitment was relatively short. His first offer didn’t come until after his sophomore season at Smith High School. The first school to reach out was Mack Brown and the North Carolina Tar Heels.

Jarrett credits his recruitment really blossoming when he transferred to Grimsley last summer.

“After transferring, I kind of figured I was going to be an SEC lineman,” Jarrett said assuredly. “Just seeing all the work they put in and the scheduling, they treat it like a college program. I wanted all the smoke. I want to be in the SEC, the best conference. I want to be coached by the best and train as hard as possible to be the best.”

Because they were the first to take a chance on him, it made the decision of not choosing UNC harder. Before officially announcing his commitment to UGA at the table, he picked up the UNC cap and thanked the coaching staff. You could tell the genuity of the gesture.

“UNC loved me and opened up their arms as well, but my home is at Georgia,” Jarrett said later. “It was really hard to get on the phone and tell Mack Brown I wasn’t going to be a Tar Heel. He’s been recruiting me since — they were the school to put me on the map. It was hard telling them no, but you can only choose one place.”

A positive attitude

At Jarrett’s commitment ceremony, Grimsley head coach Darryl Brown stands proudly towards the back of the congregation with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

He’s known Jarrett for several years now and has seen him transform as a football player just in the year that he’s been coaching him. In the last year, Jarrett has grown in height

and gotten stronger. He's learned a new defense and become a better college prospect, earning more than 30 Division 1 offers.

But the thing that hasn't changed in Jarrett is his attitude.

"I've never seen Jamaal have a bad day," Brown said. "He's always in good spirits with a positive attitude. He's a pleasure to be around."

Brown recalls times where he'd be in the weight room, having a mediocre day and Jarrett would come in and uplift his coach. That natural optimism and heart for those around him is something that can't be coached or learned.

It's a part of the 350-pound lineman that shines and is felt.

"He's very humble, very conservative," Wright said. "He likes to eat. He's just cool and chill. He doesn't ask for a lot. Anything he is interested in, he always pushes towards it and doesn't let anything get in the way."

Jarrett does like to eat. He raves about Mama's Boy in Athens, calling it the "best breakfast ever."

More important to Jarrett than food though is people.

Whether that is the fellow 9-year-olds he played soccer with when he moved to Greensboro, or his new teammates who celebrated his commitment decision like they had known each other their whole lives or the relationships he has made in Athens, Jarrett just wants to be around people who care for him.

"The whole coaching staff welcomed me and my family," Jarrett said. "Every school has something nice, but it's the people (in Athens) that just brought it up."

McClain Baxley is a recruiting reporter for the Athens Banner-Herald and the USA TODAY Network. Reach him by email at mbaxley@onlineathens.com or on Twitter at [@mcclainbaxley](https://twitter.com/mcclainbaxley).