

12 days after learning about CPR and AEDs, NFL coach used his knowledge to help save a 3-year-old

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Raheem Morris left it up to his 13-year-old daughter Amaya: Should they go to the pool? Or hit the arcade?

It was Memorial Day weekend and Morris, the defensive coordinator for the Los Angeles Rams, was in Las Vegas. He and his wife flew in the night before with their kids, 7-year-old Maliya and 4-year-old Jalen. Around midday Saturday, Amaya arrived from Florida.

With the others at the pool, Amaya was eager to join them.

"I want to get my tan on, Daddy!" she said.

As Amaya jumped in and started splashing around with her siblings, Raheem settled into a lounge chair. He ordered a drink. Before it even arrived, something happened. Something that altered the lives of several families—and, Raheem hopes, the lives of everyone reading this.

The short version is that a lifeless 3-year-old boy was pulled from the bottom of the pool and Raheem played an integral role in reviving him.

The longer version is rich in detail and lessons. Raheem is sharing it to inspire others to learn CPR and how to use an AED. After all, *he* was inspired to do so after two recent events that rocked the NFL family: the on-field cardiac arrest of Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin and the drowning death of the 2-year-old daughter of Tampa Bay Buccaneers linebacker Shaquil Barrett.

Less than two weeks after his training, Raheem put it into action.

"If I hadn't taken that course, I wouldn't have known what to do," he told American Heart Association News.

On the first Monday night of 2023, Raheem was working at home and keeping an eye on the Bills-Bengals game. He saw Hamlin make a routine tackle, stand up, then collapse. The then-24-year-old's heart had stopped beating.

The chain of survival played out perfectly. Hamlin received immediate, high-quality CPR, keeping blood and oxygen flowing, and a defibrillator was used to jolt his heart back into a sustainable rhythm. He's made a full recovery, even returning to practice.

At the time, though, everyone watching was confused and, most of all, frightened. Including Raheem. Maliya and Jalen were also watching. He hustled to turn off the TV before they could understand Hamlin's life was in jeopardy.

The rest of the week, nearly every conversation at Rams headquarters revolved around Hamlin. Players and coaches feared their own mortality. Over his 20 years in the NFL, Raheem recalls only one other time when a single issue gripped everyone so tightly, so quickly: when COVID-19 hit.

"We had to find ways to give everyone peace of mind," Raheem said.

Reggie Scott, the team's head athletic trainer, came up with one.

Scott suggested that the club offer training in CPR and how to use an AED, short for automated external defibrillator. Raheem was so enthused that he told Scott the entire defensive staff would be attending.

On a mid-May afternoon, the defensive coaches went through the session at team headquarters. When they finished, the offensive coaches

took their place.

Turnout was high because motivation was high.

In addition to Hamlin's happy outcome still fresh on everyone's mind, fresher still was a sad outcome.

On May 1, Arrayah Barrett drowned in her home pool in Tampa, Florida. This was especially jarring for Raheem. As the former head coach of the Buccaneers, he is still close with people there.

"A lot of us coaches have [young kids](#) and pregnant wives, and many of us have swimming pools," Raheem said. "It makes you realize how easily something can go wrong."

Twelve days later, Raheem was poolside in Las Vegas.

Joe Stanley was poolside, too, when his 7-year-old son came running up to him with an urgent message: "Wyatt! Wyatt! He's under the water!"

Joe dove in and found his 3-year-old son face down at the bottom. Joe grabbed Wyatt, swam to the surface and screamed for help.

About 15 yards away, Raheem turned to look. His eyes immediately landed on Wyatt's deep blue skin.

As Raheem rushed over, his recent training kicked in.

Step 1: Call 911. He saw plenty of people doing that.

Step 2: Start CPR. He told the lifeguard to do that, then moved to step 3.

"Where's the AED?" he asked her.

Raheem ran to the pool check-in area where the AED was, grabbed it and ran back, all the while thinking he'd need to take over chest compressions upon his return. So he rehearsed the steps in his mind: *Hands in the center of the chest. Push down on the sternum. Keep pressing to the pace of the song "Stayin' Alive."*

Then he got to Wyatt and the lifeguard wasn't performing CPR.

It was Dr. Andrew Oleksyn, an emergency room physician.

Oleksyn stopped compressing, cradled Wyatt's head and in a calm tone said to Raheem: "There's no pulse. We need to use the AED."

Raheem and Oleksyn got the pads connected and placed on Wyatt. The machine recommended delivering an electric shock. They did, hoping it would restore the rhythm that had gone out in the boy's heart.

Wyatt belched some water, then some food.

His heart was working.

Raheem jumped up and began moving pool chairs and other equipment to clear a path for paramedics. When they arrived and placed Wyatt on a gurney, the boy started to cry.

"Hearing that was the biggest relief ever," Raheem said.

As things played out, Raheem's wife, Nicole, noticed a boy and girl wearing swimsuits similar to Wyatt's.

"Is my brother alive?" one of the kids asked her. "Is he going to die?"

Realizing these were Wyatt's siblings, she whisked them from the scene. It was a much higher-stakes version of Raheem turning off the TV so his kids couldn't see things play out with Hamlin.

Once Wyatt was headed to the hospital, Raheem began processing everything.

First, he called to thank Scott, the Rams athletic trainer, for the CPR and AED training.

Next, he called Rams head coach Sean McVay.

"How fortunate was it that we did the training?" Raheem told him. "I wasn't just a bystander. I was actually able to be helpful."

Wyatt traveled home with his family days later.

"Truly a miracle," his mother, Kelseigh Stanley, told "Good Morning America" during a segment that included a reunion of her family, Raheem and Oleksyn.

The odds certainly were against Wyatt.

Less than half of all people who need CPR from bystanders receive it before help arrives. But having a bystander perform CPR doubles or triples the chances of survival.

Playing defense is all about assessing what's happening, figuring out how to thwart it and then doing it.

With a child's life on the line, that's exactly what Raheem did.

"You hate to put something like this in football terms, but there was a similarity," Raheem said. "If you're a play-caller, you have to ignore the stadium noise around you to sit in calm, conscious thought and make the play call. At the pool, it was the same thing. Turn off the noise, stay calm and focus on the task at hand."

Since helping save Wyatt, Raheem keeps noticing AEDs everywhere he goes. Including his home. He bought one for his house, another for his lake house.

"I'm shocked they're not more readily available," he said. "Lots of high schools don't have them. They should be as common as fire extinguishers."

Nicole is getting into the lifesaving spirit, too. She's organizing a CPR and AED training class for the wives of Rams coaches.

"How many more people can we save?" Raheem said.

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