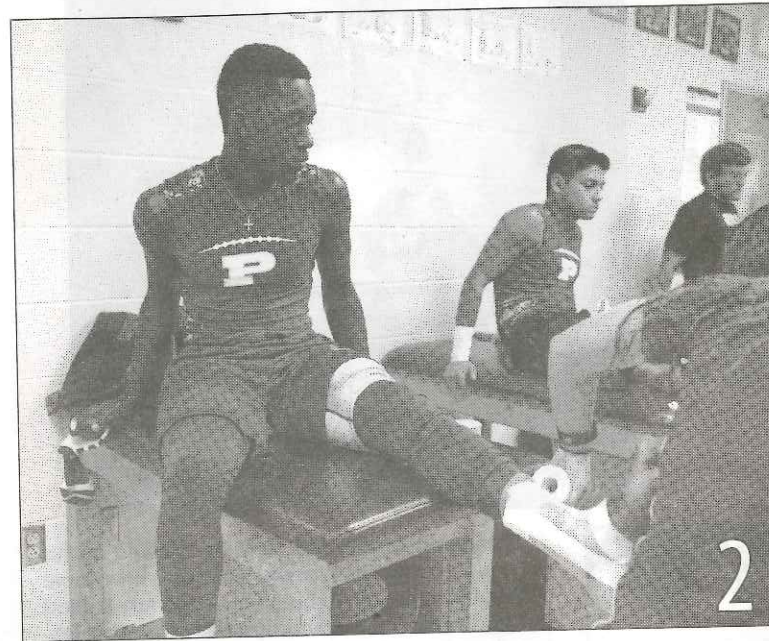
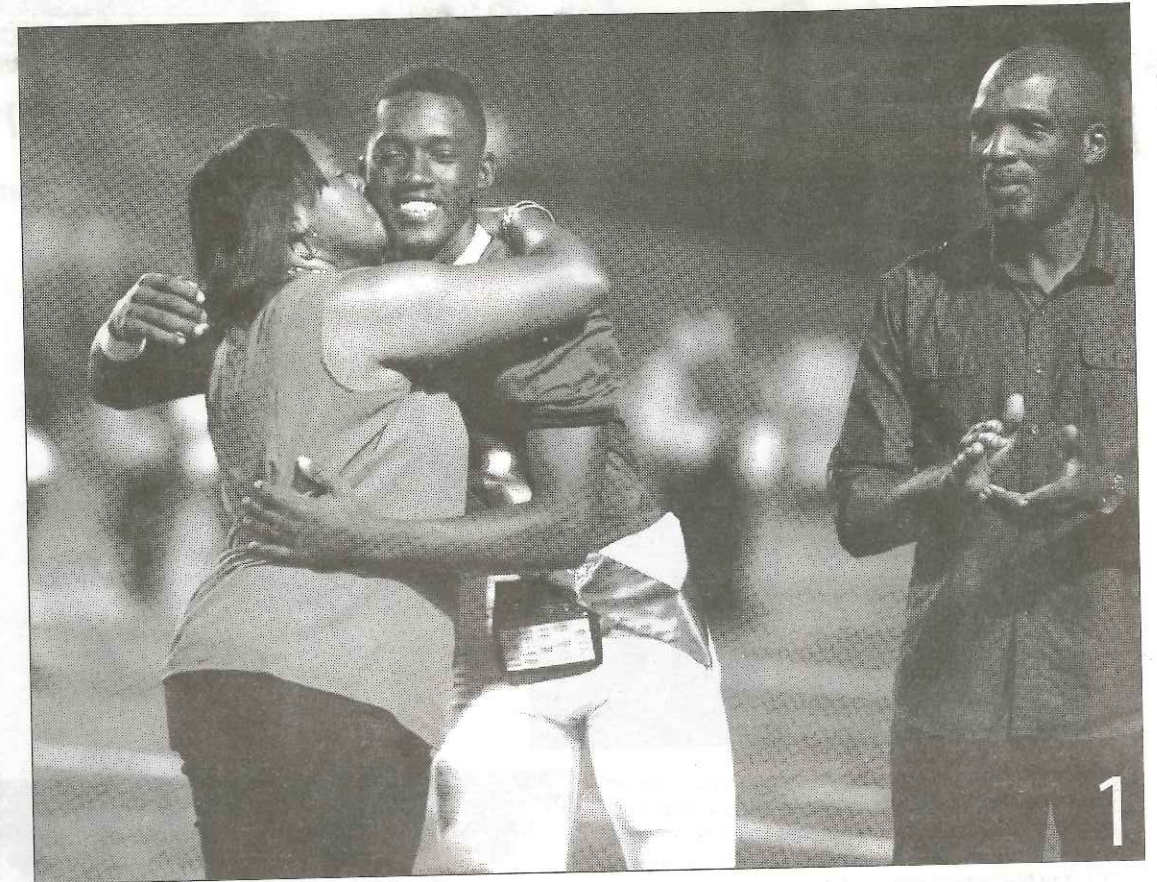


# King for a Day

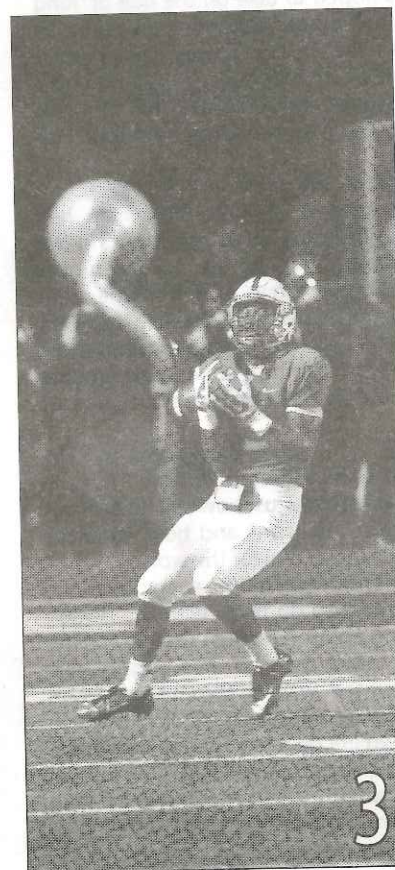
Senior Alex Shillow crowned Homecoming King



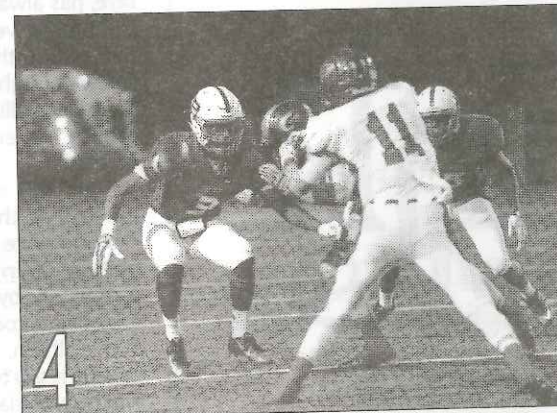
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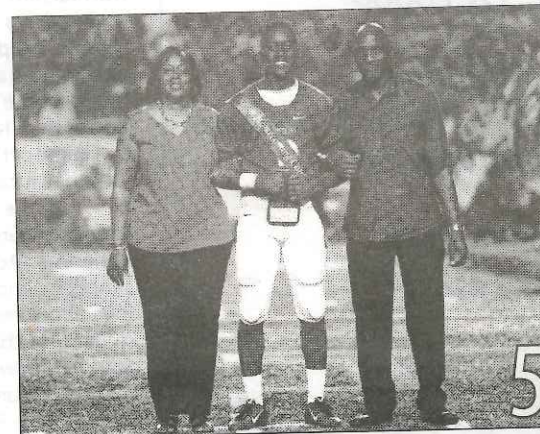
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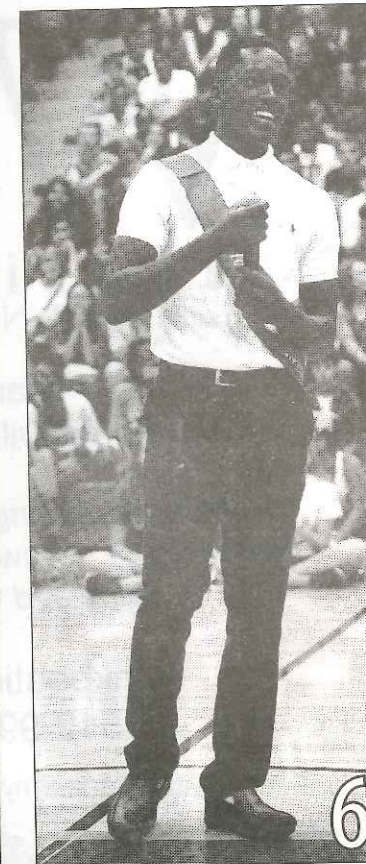
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1. Senior Alex Shillow hugs his mother, Sherry Shillow, as his father, Gerald Shillow, looks on after Alex is announced as Homecoming King at halftime of the Panthers' 17-13 loss to Georgetown on September 11 at Kuempel Stadium. "It was just very exciting," Shillow said. "Winning Homecoming King just felt awesome."

2. A trainer tapes Shillow's ankles in the fieldhouse before the game. Shillow gets his ankles taped before every game.

3. Shillow receives a punt during the first half. Shillow is a safety, wide receiver and a captain for the Panthers.

4. Shillow attempts to recover a fumble during the second half.

5. The Shillow family poses for a photo at midfield during the Homecoming Court ceremony. "It was great to have them by my side during that special moment," Shillow said of his parents.

6. Shillow prepares to address the school at the Homecoming Pep Rally in the big gym. "I'll never be able to experience that again," Shillow said of his last Homecoming game.

-Photos by Madison Masters



# Kindness Matters

Former PHS teacher launches anti-bullying campaign following son's death

ANTONIJA ANTUNOVIC & KENNEDY HUFF  
PROWLER CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

The picture most people have seen of Peyton James, with his blue eyes, red hair, and piercing stare, was one of more than 100 that former PHS English teacher Jacki James took of her son that day. James had just purchased Peyton his own camera, and the two had been out all day playing with it.

"In that picture," James said, "he's sitting on this stump, and I'm standing over him saying, 'One more, smile.' And he looks at me [with a] face that says, 'Mother, please stop taking my picture.' And it turned out beautifully. It really does capture who he is, I think."

This is one of James' favorite memories of her son, Peyton, who died by suicide last October. Peyton, who was 13, had ADHD, struggled with anxiety and depression and was bullied by his classmates for a myriad of reasons, including the color of his teeth.

Peyton spent time in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) due to a tooth infection. The pure oxygen he received while in the NICU resulted in a yellow discoloration of his teeth.

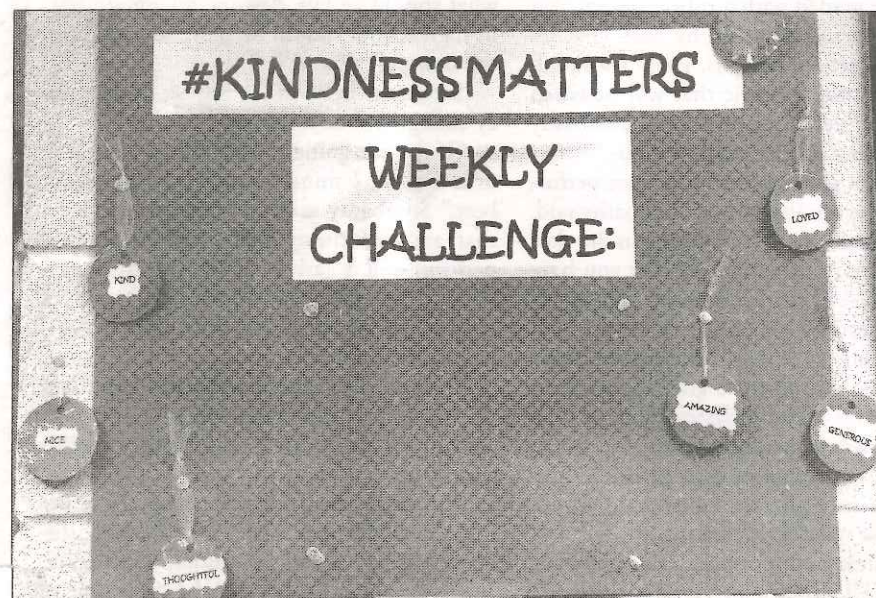
"He had popcorn kernels stuck in his teeth, but all over," James said.

"Where it started. The kids were saying, 'Why are your teeth so nasty?'"

"I'd throw in [the fact that] he had red hair, he wore glasses, he wasn't athletic, he liked to read. I called him my little nerd. The kids picked on him for that kind of thing."

James would tell her son, "You're going to be their boss someday. Just let it roll off your back." She took him to see a therapist when he started talking about "how much everyone's lives would be without him."

"My father and I were divorced, he changed schools, he was being picked on and teased," James said. "He had a lot of cards stacked against him."



A sign in Jacki James' English classroom at East View High School displays the weekly Kindness Matters challenge. "We do something different every week," James said. "Last week was to compliment one of your friends on social media and really tell them why you like them." Photo by Madison Masters

The bullies who tormented Peyton at school—throwing rocks, tripping him up the stairs, and in one instance, shattering his eardrum—were left behind last summer when James moved her son from Round Rock to Georgetown, where James took a job teaching English at East View High School. The move was presented as a clean slate. But the tranquility didn't last long.

"The teasing started again," James said. "It wasn't so much about his appearance anymore—he had gotten really tall and had contacts—but about the things he was interested in."

Peyton would rather stay inside, engrossed in the worlds of anime, Pokémon and Minecraft, than play outside. While he found solace in these activities, some students used them as daggers to cut down his self-esteem.

On Oct. 7, he had an altercation with a boy. Peyton didn't know the boy because he was new to the school, and there weren't any video cameras, so the boy was never identified. Peyton didn't tell his mom about the incident until the next day, after he had talked to his principal.

"I think Peyton felt a little bit abandoned," James said. "He came home from school and we talked about it, and I told him the same things. 'Just ignore it. Don't worry about it. It's not that big of a deal.' And I think maybe he felt a little abandoned by me too. We'd been home about 20 minutes, and I found him."

James was lost after Peyton's death.

"My whole life, I'd only wanted to be a mother," James said. "And then I wasn't one anymore. At that moment, I couldn't see myself coming back to work, I couldn't see myself really even getting out of bed. And then Kindness Matters started."

Kindness Matters began as a hashtag and a Facebook page called "Prayers for Peyton" while Peyton was in the hospital. After he died, Kindness Matters became a way for James to reach out to friends. The Facebook page, which started with a couple hundred likes, now has more than 18,000 followers.

James also started a website ([www.kindness-matters.org](http://www.kindness-matters.org)) through which she has sold bright orange Kindness Matters T-shirts and bracelets to people in nearly all 50 states, as well as six countries. James' next goal for the campaign is to make Kindness Matters a federally recognized non-profit organization.

"We all recognize that we could be a little bit more nice, we could be a little bit more kind to the people around us," James said. "I think that's why [Kindness Matters] has grown so much and why people have responded the way they have because it is something positive, and we don't hear enough positive in the world."

After working together in the English department at PHS for five years, James and Patricia Ansley developed a close friendship. When Ansley learned of Peyton's death, she started a fundraiser on the crowdfunding website Youcaring that raised \$1,200 for the Peyton James Memorial Fund.

"There's so many [PHS] kids who may not even be aware of what happened to her, [kids] who loved her, who cared about her deeply," Ansley said. "Even though she's not here anymore, she's still one of our own."

English teacher Rebecca Cohen, who taught next door to James last year, tries to spread the Kindness Matters message to her students.

"Her movement has inspired me to incorporate that [positivity] into my day-to-day lessons and teach students that the smallest of things can mean so much to a person," Cohen said. "You never know what a person is going through, you never know the kind of day they're having, and the tiniest bit of kindness can change everything for a person."

All of the Kindness Matters proceeds will fund a scholarship James is starting in Peyton's name for students majoring in veterinary medicine at Texas A&M.



Former PHS English teacher Jacki James holds a photo of her son Peyton, who died by suicide in October. Peyton, who had ADHD, also struggled with anxiety and depression and was bullied by his classmates. "My whole life, I'd only wanted to be a mother," James said. "And then I wasn't one anymore. At that moment, I couldn't see myself coming back to work, I couldn't see myself really even getting out of bed. And then Kindness Matters started." Photo by Madison Masters

"Texas A&M is where Peyton wanted to go to school," James said. "He wanted to be a vet. It's kind of Peyton's way of getting to go to college. He'll get to be an Aggie, which breaks my Longhorn heart."

On Jan. 16, a rally was held in downtown Georgetown to celebrate the first official Kindness Matters day. Georgetown Mayor Dale Ross, along with friends, family, and supporters of Kindness Matters, assembled to commemorate Peyton's life.

"Someone told me before, '[Kindness Matters] will give his death meaning,'" James said. "There's never going to be a meaning to it. It's never going to make sense, it's never going to be right, it's never going to have been the best thing. I will never believe that. But knowing that through Peyton I can maybe keep one other child from going through what he went through, and help one other mother not go through what I'm going through, then it gives me a little bit of purpose. It gives me a reason to get up and move forward with my life."



# Ode to Code

## *Math club hosts after-school computer programming event*

MOSES VILLANUEVA & MIKE DOAN  
PROWLER REPORTERS

Dec. 8 marked the first time PHS students participated in the Hour of Code, a national event that was created to spark student interest in computer science careers. The after-school event, which was organized by the math club, attracted more than 50 students and included sessions on computer programming, computer science, robotics and code breaking.

"I sat through one of the lectures, and I thought that [it] was really interesting," senior math club member Jacob Martinsen said. "[It] humbled me and made me feel like part of something bigger. Taking part in it and helping other people, I like that very much."

DIMM teacher Quintard Taylor and computer science teacher Jennifer Persons ran the code writing session. Robotics teacher Chris Riola gave students a chance to operate robots that his students use in competitions. The third session featured guest speaker Joshua Blair, a PHS grad who is a senior studying computer science at the University of Texas.

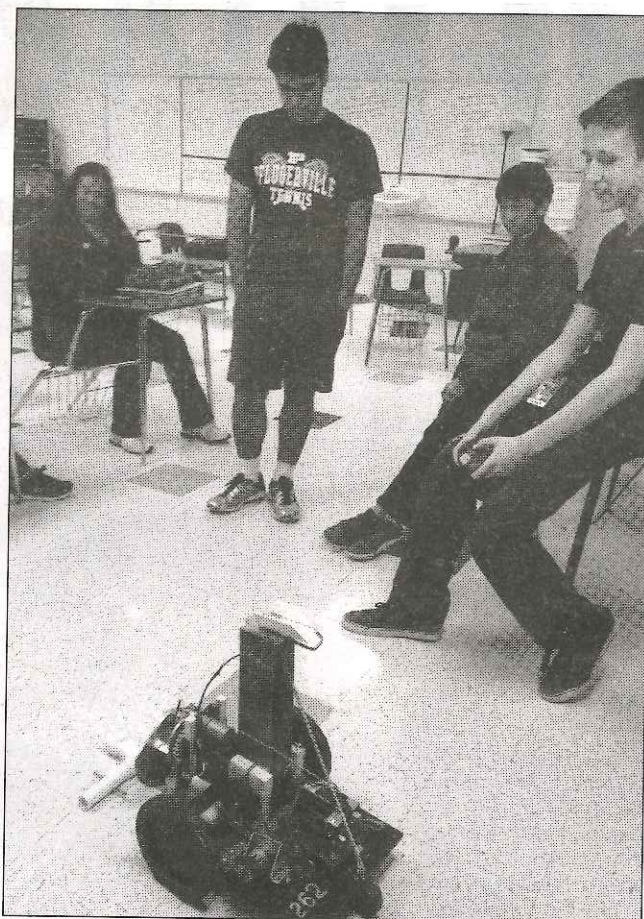
"We had a guest speaker from the University of Texas who spoke about cyber security and code breaking, which was really relevant because it was the week of the Sony hacking incident," math club sponsor Dixie Ross said.

Ross said one of the big issues in the computer science industry is a lack of women. However, nearly half the students who attended the Hour of Code event were females.

"There's also a shortage of Hispanics and African-Americans who are interested in computer science," Ross said. "And 42 percent of the students who came after school were minorities, so that was the thing that I was happiest about. The students were definitely thinking about taking the computer science classes we offer here."

Due to the success, Ross said math club hopes to host two more coding events this spring.

"During the spring semester, we hope maybe someone who works as a computer programmer, or for a game design-



Left to right: Junior Kaitlin Alvarado, junior Hesler Hernandez and freshman Keeno Hebrado look on as freshman Danny Link controls a robot provided by the robotics team at the after-school Hour of Code event on Dec. 8. Photo provided by Alex Womack

ing company comes by," Ross said.

Martinsen has high hopes for future coding events.

"I expect that it will either do just as well if not better because this time we know there are more people that are interested in getting knowledge about these kinds of things so next time we might have more people," Martinsen said. "I'm looking forward to that."

—Additional reporting by Catherine Atkinson and Christine Hanley



# Wright Hook

*Sophomore out to prove herself as female boxer*

SUMIT NAGAR  
SPORTS EDITOR

Sophomore Taylor Wright has never felt out of place at the gym. But when she first started training as a boxer, she could tell that others treated her differently.

"At first, it was just weird because the whole sport is male-oriented," Wright said. "You feel like they expect less from you, but after I proved to them that I could fight well, it was a lot less weird."

Wright has been training as a boxer for more than seven months.

"My dad bought me a training dummy for my birthday," Wright said, "so I actually thought that I should get good at fighting."

Wright had to convince her parents to continue on with the sport.

"[My parents] thought that we didn't [wear face guards]," Wright said. "When I told them [that we did], they were more open to it."

Wright trains at MBA Boxing Gym every day after school.

"Usually I'll get there and I'll warm up for a little bit, maybe sprint," Wright said. "Then I punch the bag for 30 minutes. Then a bunch of us get in the ring and we shadow box. We don't wear gloves or anything, we punch the air in these 3-minute cycles and then rest for a minute."

Wright has yet to fight in a competition. However, she still has other things to motivate her.

"I can see that I'm getting better, and I've set little goals for myself like I want to get better at a certain way of punching," Wright said. "So I do get rewards while I'm doing it."

When Wright trains at the gym, she is usually the only girl there and she holds that as a badge of honor.

"I feel like I get a little cocky sometimes because I feel like I am pretty good at it," Wright said. "You can't be too confident I guess."

# New York state of mind

## *PHS grad learning how to make it as a musician*

CASEY AGUILAR & MARI JARAMILLO  
PROWLER REPORTERS

Sylvester Onyejiaka was living in New York, selling rugs eight hours a day at Macy's and struggling to jumpstart his musical career. Any spare time he had—even his lunch break—was spent practicing his saxophone and going to gigs. To his surprise, it was at one of these gigs that he reconnected with an old friend. Together, they began recording music that eventually caught the attention of Prince on YouTube.

"And the next thing I know, I'm touring the world," said Onyejiaka, a 2004 PHS grad. "I had many different ideas about how my career would go, but that wasn't one of them."

Onyejiaka, a 28-year-old jazz musician, composer, and producer living in New York, got hooked on music at an early age.

"I always liked musical-type movies, all those Disney cartoons," Onyejiaka said. "My favorite part was always the songs."

Onyejiaka started out playing the saxophone in the seventh grade band. Some of his fondest high school memories center around the PHS band.

"The whole program, the underlying theme of it was the letter 'P' on your hat stands for Pflugerville, but it also stands for pride. Whatever it is you're doing, do it to the fullest," Onyejiaka said.

Onyejiaka was known for being responsible with his academics, expressive of his love of music and generally well-liked.



"I remember Sylvester being very inquisitive when it came to music; he had lots of questions," band director O.D. Wilson said. "I remember him being a lover of jazz and hip-hop but also embracing his academics and just being a really good student. He didn't have a leadership position [in band], but he was looked up to and pretty much adored by everyone."

After graduating from the University of North Texas, Onyejiaka spent four months working on a cruise ship to save enough money to move to New York, where his biggest adjustment was learning how to make it as a musician.

"There's no prescribed method," Onyejiaka said. "There's no direct path. You just kind of go out and meet people and try to make it happen."

Once he was discovered by Prince, Onyejiaka's career began to blossom. He has traveled the world, performing in places such as the island country of Curacao, Colombia, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Thailand and Japan. In addition to Prince, Onyejiaka has also worked with artists

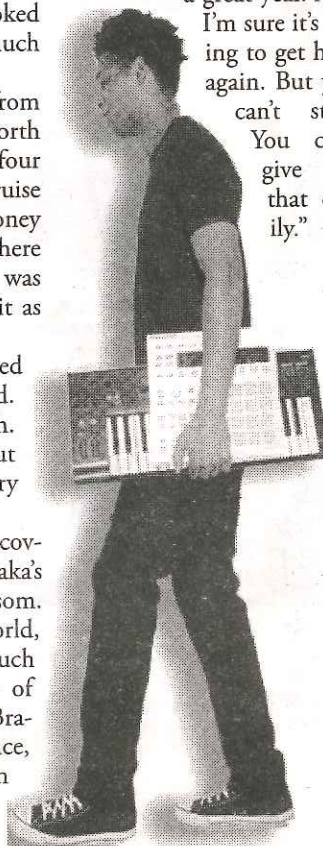
such as Taylor Swift, 50 Cent, Jennifer Hudson and Janelle Monae.

"[Prince] was very difficult to work with sometimes, but I learned the most from him because he expected so much from us all the time," Onyejiaka said. "He's a musical genius, so just being able to be exposed to that, I hope a little bit of it rubbed off [on me]."

One day, Onyejiaka plans to tour the world under his own name.

"In your mind, you've got to make up what it is you want to do, and you can't let anything get in your way," Onyejiaka said. "It's been hard before for me, and it's been really, really good. This past year was a great year. And

I'm sure it's going to get hard again. But you can't stop. You can't give up that easily."



—Photos provided by Sylvester Onyejiaka