



ABOVE: The Buffalo Bills players pray for Hamlin during Monday night's game against the Cincinnati Bengals. The game is currently postponed.

RIGHT: Damar Hamlin prepares to make a tackle against Tee Higgins in Monday night's game against Cincinnati. The tackle caused a cardiac event that eventually led to the game's postponement after Hamlin was revived on the field.

AP Photos/Joshua A. Bickel



Fans give millions to Damar Hamlin's toy drive for kids

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Sports Writer

Damar Hamlin's goal was simple: He wanted to raise \$2,500 online to buy toys for needy kids.

It took about two years.

Then came Monday, when the Buffalo Bills safety was critically injured and needed his heart restarted on the field in a chilling scene that unfolded during a nationally televised game against the Cincinnati Bengals. He instantly became one of the biggest stories in sports, and thousands of people found his GoFundMe page.

The result: roughly \$5.5 million donated in the first 24 hours after his injury. And the number is climbing.

A fundraiser that as of last month had raised \$2,921 was up to \$5,495,550 by 9 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday — with about 183,000 people going online in that span to donate, on average, about \$30. Some of the donations were smaller. Some were more than \$5,000. A number of NFL players donated as well, including members of the New England Patriots, who are scheduled to play at Buffalo on Sunday for the regular-season finale.

On average, about 2.2 donations were made through his GoFundMe page every second in the first 24 hours after Hamlin got hurt. And many came with messages of hope for a 24-year-old player in his second season, sedated in a Cincinnati hospital, listed in critical condition and with some teammates unwilling to return to Buffalo just so they could remain close to him.

"There are moments in life that stop the world," wrote Michael Lynch, who donated. "We all pray for two things. Your speedy recovery and that your impact to the world is enhanced by your go fund me."

The messages poured in from different fan bases, many of the donors letting the world know that they support other teams. One came with a hashtag that read, "we are all Bills fans."

Hamlin started the GoFundMe in December 2020. He was just wrapping up his college career and getting ready for the NFL draft process. And he wanted to have a toy drive at Kelly and Nina's Daycare Center — a facility co-owned by his mother — in his hometown of McKees Rocks, Penn-

sylvania, a place with about 6,000 residents along the south bank of the Ohio River.

"As I embark on my journey to the NFL, I will never forget where I come from and I am committed to using my platform to positively impact the community that raised me," Hamlin wrote when setting up the drive. "I created The Chasing M's Foundation as a vehicle that will allow me to deliver that impact, and the first program is the 2020 Community Toy Drive. This campaign gives you the opportunity to contribute to our first initiative and positively impact children who have been hardest hit by the pandemic."

He pulled the first event off with about 10 days of planning. Gifts poured in, some of it clothing donated by Pitt, where he had just finished playing. Hamlin's upbringing was far from easy: He lost three friends to gun violence while growing up and saw his father incarcerated for about 3 1/2 years for selling drugs. But as soon as he was able, Hamlin wanted to help others.

So, he started the toy drive. And his foundation will now have the ability to do more good than it likely ever thought possible.

"Damar created The Chasing M's Foundation to use as a vehicle to bring lasting impact to his community," his foundation wrote in a message posted to the donation page Tuesday. "The foundation supports toy drives, back-to-school drives, kids camps, and more."

Many of the donations came from Bills fans, affectionately known as Bills Mafia, and this is far from the first time they've gone online to show support. In recent years, Bills fans have shown support for Miami quarterback Tua Tagovailoa's foundation after he left a game — also in Cincinnati — with a concussion; for Baltimore quarterback Lamar Jackson's charity after the Ravens lost a playoff game to Buffalo; and many made donations of \$16.88 to the P.U.N.T. Pediatric Cancer Collaborative in western New York following the death this summer of FIU player Luke Knox.

Luke Knox's brother, Dawson Knox, is a tight end for the Bills. The \$16.88 was a nod to their jersey numbers.

Sports world reacts to Hamlin's injury

By The Associated Press

Many fellow NFL players and teams and others in the sports world quickly offered their support and prayers on social media for Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who the NFL said was in critical condition after being transported to a hospital after collapsing on the field during Monday night's game against the Cincinnati Bengals. ESPN reported Hamlin was administered CPR on the field before being taken away in an ambulance. The game was suspended after Hamlin's injury.

"Bills Mafia is with you, @HamlinIsland." — Buffalo Bills on Twitter.

"Please pray for our brother." — Bills quarterback Josh Allen on Twitter.

"My prayers and thoughts go out to @HamlinIsland the Hamlin Family. I'm praying that you pull through bro. Love." — Bengals wide receiver Tee Higgins, who was tackled by Hamlin on the play during which the Bills safety was injured.

"Damar Hamlin is a kind caring extremely hard worker. He is loyal honest and can always put a smile on your face. He is more than an athlete, he is a son and brother. I pray God gives him mercy and brings him back to us." — Bills offensive lineman Rodger Saffold on Twitter.

"Prayer is power and Prayer is POWERFUL we need the world to pray for Damar Hamlin and his family #Love #3" — Bills offensive tackle Dion Dawkins on Twitter.

"Sending our thoughts and prayers to Damar." — Cincinnati Bengals on Twitter.

"Damar Hamlin is the best of us. We love you, 3. Praying for you." — University of Pittsburgh's football account on Twitter. Hamlin played his college ball at Pitt.

"No one's been through this. I've never seen anything like it, either." — Longtime NFL quarterback Troy Aikman on the ESPN telecast.

"The NFLPA and everyone in our community is praying for Damar Hamlin. We have been in touch with Bills and Bengals players, and with the NFL. The only thing that matters at this moment is Damar's health and well being." — The NFL Players Association in a statement.

"Never before have I ever witnessed anything like this. The game doesn't matter. Praying for Damar and his family." — Former Bills quarterback and Pro Football Hall of Famer Jim Kelly on Twitter.

"Football family & #billsmafia - With our prayers combined we can come together for #damarhamlin ... God cover #3." — Former Bills wide receiver and Pro Football Hall of Famer Andre Reed on Twitter.

"The game is not important. Damar Hamlin's life is important. Please be ok. Please." — Arizona Cardinals defensive end J.J. Watt on Twitter.

"Praying hard.. please be okay man." — Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes on Twitter.

"It was definitely the right call (to postpone the game) by Roger Goodell or whoever had the authority to make that call. The safety of players in all sports is always the most important. It is a terrible thing to see and I wish nothing but the best for that kid and the city of Buffalo, for the franchise of the Bills and the rest of the NFL and also the Bengals that were playing in that game as well. I'm a huge fan of the NFL and a huge fan of football and you never want to see anything like that happen." — NBA star LeBron James after the Los Angeles Lakers' 121-115 win at Charlotte.

"Prayers for Hamlin. i hope everything is okay." — Former Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker Ryan Shazier, who suffered a serious spinal injury on the same field in 2017 that left him briefly paralyzed.

"Absolutely speechless.. please pull through Damar!" — Pittsburgh Steelers outside linebacker T.J. Watt on Twitter.