



La Center senior receiver Davari Grauer shows off his bright gloves Wednesday, Sept. 28, 2022, at La Center High School. Grauer wears the gloves for his grandfather, who has Alzheimer's. The colorful gloves allow Grauer's grandfather to find his grandson on the field when he forgets what number he wears. () (Taylor Balkom/The Columbian)

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LA CENTER — Across a uniform of blue, gray and white, a contrasting streak of yellow, or occasionally, pink, stands out in a crowd of La Center football players.

The source is Davari Grauer.

Specifically, it's the brightly-colored gloves worn by the speedy senior wide receiver, and, contrary to what some assumed when he first introduced the gloves, they're not a fashion statement.

Grauer wears the gloves so he can be easily identified from the stands by his grandfather, David Grauer, whom Davari credits with teaching him “basically everything I know about football.”

Four years ago, David Grauer was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, a progressive disease that affects memory, thinking and behavior. He often forgets what uniform number Davari is wearing, or where he's lined up on the field. But from the first time Davari wore pink gloves last season, his grandfather immediately made the connection.

“I was like, ‘Yo, I gotta keep wearing these,’ ” Davari Grauer recalled. “Because if he can't remember what number I am, then these are the perfect (alternatives) to remember me on the field.”

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With the blessing from his La Center team, the gloves have stuck with Grauer. They symbolize the relationship between Grauer and his grandfather, who's been a father figure for much of his life.

“It’s football and we take it very seriously, what we do. We try to take ourselves too seriously at times,” La Center head coach John Lambert said. “But there’s things like this that are bigger than the game.”

During Grauer’s childhood, he lived with his grandparents, David and Phyllis Grauer, in their Battle Ground house along with his mother, Cicely Grauer-Stewart, and younger brother, Tavear Grauer.

Without his biological father present, Davari’s male role model growing up was his grandfather. Going back to his football playing days in Longview in the 1950s, David passed on his love and knowledge of the sport to his grandson.

Their training ground was the yard and the wooded area around the house. The first thing Davari remembers learning was how to stay balanced.

“We’d go out there and (he’d say), ‘stand on one leg on this log for as long as you can, or walk in a straight line and try and balance,’ ” Davari Grauer said. “He tried to get me into ballet, which helps for wide receivers (now) that I look back at it. ... I’d just run around the lawn, he’d have me run around sometimes and it just conditioned me for that team aspect.”

Davari first started playing the sport between ages 6 and 7, and David often went games with an old-school video recorder to film his grandson, then would replay game film on home VHS tapes on the family's TV.

"I didn't think much of it, but looking back on it now, it was kind of like film (sessions) like we do now," Davari Grauer said.

The family noticed changes in David Grauer's cognitive function well before he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2018. He struggled with short-term memory, forgetting routine, everyday things, or something that happened just days prior.

According to the nonprofit [Alzheimer's Association](#), an estimated 6.5 million Americans 65 and older are living with the disease in 2022. In Washington, the figure is approximately 120,000 people, and [projected to grow to 140,000 by 2025](#).

"He relives certain events a lot and those are his strongest memories," said Grauer-Stewart, his daughter. "If I'm in a car with him, I usually hear the same story repeatedly. ... He doesn't remember that he just told me. It's progressively gotten worse, but initially, it just started with, 'we just did that last week, how come you don't remember it?'"

He might also forget when Davari's La Center football games are, but likes to ask for reminders. With the exception of a road game that requires a long drive, he attends practically every game.

"He gets very excited about games. He has a hard time remembering things, ever, so if I tell him there's a game coming up, he's like, 'oh, what time?'" Grauer-Stewart said. "Because he wants to make sure that he's there ... it's very important for him to be there."

Midway through Davari's junior football season last year, he debuted a pink pair of Battle "Money Man" receiver gloves during Breast Cancer Awareness Month to honor people he knew who battled the disease, including one of his favorite teachers at La Center Middle School, Kim Hollopeter, whom he said played a key part in helping him graduate on time.

After the game, Davari talked to his mom, who had been sitting in the stands with his grandfather. Normally, he'd rely on others to point out where Davari was on the field, but this game, he spotted his grandson instantly.

It was the gloves, of course.

“He had a hard time remembering Davari’s number,” Grauer-Stewart said. “But if I just say, ‘pink gloves,’ somehow, I don’t know why, he’ll be watching the game and he goes, ‘oh, I see the pink gloves.’ ”

The revelation inspired Davari to find another secondary color of gloves to wear for his grandfather. Red was out of the question because Castle Rock, one of La Center’s main Trico League rivals, wears that color. So were other rival colors green (Woodland) and orange (Ridgefield).

He eventually decided on a pair of Phenom “Reverse Flash” gloves, primarily yellow with a lightning bolt symbol based on the DC Comics character. Later this season around Halloween, he plans to introduce a new pair of purple and orange gloves. He’s curious to see if his grandfather can pick those out on the field too.

“No team we play wears yellow,” Davari Grauer said. “It was just perfect.”

Initially, coaches and teammates were curious why Grauer had gloves that were different from La Center’s color scheme. The topic eventually reached assistant coach Randy Martinez and Lambert, who’s been La Center’s head coach since 1999. At this point, it’s practically an unwritten rule that you stick to wearing blue, gray, white or black while representing La Center.

But Lambert understood this situation was different. He was reminded of his first interactions with David Grauer years ago when he brought his grandsons, Davari and Tavear, to youth football camps at La Center.

“Normally when you’re in a team environment, you’re not a big fan of kids trying to draw attention to themselves that isn’t about the team,” Lambert said. “It’s like everything in life when, sometimes you get perspective on people’s situations and all of a sudden you go, ‘oh, I get it now.’”

“I thought it was a great idea, actually, and I think it’s really nice that he can do something (for his grandpa).”

The Reverse Flash gloves, in particular, are fitting for an athlete with elite speed who can “take the top off of a defense,” Lambert said.

Grauer went over 100 receiving yards with a touchdown in recent wins over Kalama and Connell and also returned a kickoff for a touchdown in the latter game.

It’s an encouraging sign, because, in Lambert’s words, Grauer didn’t have a particularly strong fall camp, which led to him not starting in the first two games of the season.



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As the head coach saw it, Grauer was in his own head, and was letting things outside of football affect his performance. Talks between coaches, Grauer and his mom were productive, and Lambert noticed a change by the middle of September.

“At some point, he just made the decision, this is my last chance,” Lambert said. “I need to make the most of it, and it’s my choice to make these decisions. Ever since he started doing that, he started popping. He was given the opportunity and he stepped up. It was really exciting for us as coaches to see that, because we didn’t want to lose him as a player emotionally out here. We knew what he was capable of, and he’s shown it the last two games.”

Grauer is motivated by the finality of his senior football season, and knowing the Wildcats have a chance to put together a run in the Class 1A playoffs. Above all else though, his family, and his grandpa, continue to propel him forward.

“My family has always been there,” Grauer said. “They’re the main reason, especially my grandpa, of course. This might be the last football season he ever gets to see me play.”

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