

# De’Jovia Davis leads in all corners of campus life

By Stephen Thompson, Sports Editor

It’s hard to be at Pitt — whether as a prospective student or head coach of the women’s basketball team — and not cross paths with De’Jovia Davis, a senior urban studies major known to friends as Jovi.

Panther fans have certainly enjoyed the fruits of her labor while cheering on the women’s basketball team at the Pete, or taking in a Pitt band performance at Heinz Field. Potential Panthers have been on her tours around campus, and incoming students have met a figure who is helping them get used to college life.

To some, it seems like Davis is using superhuman effort to create time for a myriad of jobs and activities. But to her, it doesn’t feel Herculean. Davis composed a loaded schedule gradually, integrating jobs and clubs as she grew into herself at Pitt. Now she has extended her reach all across campus and beyond, from mentoring to community service to athletics.

“I’m able to do what I love,” Davis said. “I love going to practice. I love going to band. I love giving tours for Pathfinders. So everything I do, that I’m busy with, it’s not like I have to go here. I want to go here and I’m the type of person that likes to be busy.”

Davis is deeply involved with each organization she’s affiliated with. Davis is a four-year member of the Pathfinders, Pitt’s tour guide group. She’s also a First Year Mentor, working with young students to help them get adjusted to Pitt and college life in general. She has two hands in Pitt athletics, as an assistant drum major — the first Black woman to ever hold that position — and head student manager of the women’s basketball team.

All of her work culminated in a proverbial crowning achievement this fall. During the Homecoming football game vs. New Hampshire on Sept. 25, Davis won the Spirit of Pitt Award, which honors two students at Pitt who “display a commitment to academic excellence, community service and the Pitt Alumni Association’s values.”

When Davis accepted the award while standing on the 50-yard line of Heinz Field, she had the Pitt band — a collection of some of her longest-held and closest friends — at her back, and her family, who made long trips to meet in Pittsburgh for that special day, in the stands cheering along with the rest of the stadium.

Her parents and sister Deonnah came from their hometown of Savannah, Georgia, and her other two sisters, Danielle and Diazmyn, trekked from their respective schools — Kennesaw State University and the University of Kentucky.

The moment was years in the making and began when Davis auditioned for the band prior to arriving on campus in fall 2018.

Chrissy Shannon, a 2020 Pitt alumna and the first female drum major in the band’s history, and Davis were close during their shared time in the Pitt band. Shannon was Davis’ “big brother” in Kappa Kappa Psi, a band fraternity that, according to Shannon, seeks out and tries to foster future leaders within the band as a whole.

When Davis joined during her first year, Shannon, a trailblazing drum major herself, instantly recognized that Davis had the kind of magnetism and leadership qualities that are necessary to be successful in such a role.



Pamela Smith | Visual Editor

De’Jovia Davis, a senior urban studies major, is a 2021 Homecoming Spirit of Pitt award recipient, Pathfinder, First Year Mentor, assistant drum major and the head student manager of the women’s basketball team.

Davis initially showed interest in following in Shannon's footsteps as a drum major "late in the game," according to Shannon. But when the burgeoning band star did, Shannon was immediately supportive. And when she finally earned the position of assistant drum major and followed in Shannon's barrier-breaking footsteps, feelings of hope turned to joy and pride.

"It's a relief, first of all, that it wasn't just one-and-done then go back to the way things were," Shannon said. "But I think she's the perfect person. I just trust her. I don't worry about anything. She's perfect for the job. ... It's not shocking. It's really nice and I'm really proud of her."

Those skills translated well to her role as a basketball manager, which Davis picked up in the fall of her sophomore year. She saw a flyer hanging around campus and contacted the program's director of operations, Ali Hoesly.

Like Shannon, Hoesly was immediately struck by Davis' intangibles. Hoesly said she was professional, instinctive and had an x-factor that endeared her to the players and coaching staff immediately. She's detail-oriented as well, Hoesly said, remembering and maintaining even the smallest of routines, like how head coach Lance White enjoys his iced tea with extra ice.

She was an obvious choice to take over the role of head manager in her junior year, according to Hoesly.

"In her second year with us, we promoted her to head manager," Hoesly said. "She just displays a ton of leadership qualities. She is super organized and dedicated. She gets the basketball world in the sense that we move fast and you have to keep up and anticipate."

Davis' duties primarily involve overseeing the other managers, but she also plays a direct role herself, helping set up practice, acting as a liaison for program staff and traveling with the team, among other constantly changing, daily tasks.

Hoesly and Davis have become close over their time working together. Hoesly, along with the rest of White's coaching staff, arrived at Pitt at the same time as Davis, in fall 2018. They've had to learn the ins and outs of campus life simultaneously.

Now, as Davis prepares to graduate, she said Hoesly is taking an active role in teaching about how a college sports program is run. Davis hopes to attend graduate school after this year but college athletics is a career field she is interested in, so she's trying to absorb all the knowledge that she can.

"I forget sometimes that we are a business," Davis said. "[Hoesly] oversees all the managers as well. She's really helped me learn more about the business because I do want to work in college athletics and then also been there as a friend and a mentor."

During some of her limited spare time, Davis gets off campus to volunteer as a middle school mentor at the African American Achievement Trust, a branch of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, and Urban Impact as a basketball and soccer coach. Both are located in the Hill District, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Pittsburgh.

With the AAAT, Davis mentors an eighth grader named Trinity, who she's watched grow into a young woman over her time with the program. They talk about a range of things when together, anything from building self confidence, progress in school and Black history.

"She's amazing," Davis said. "She is someone who really depends on relationships so I've tried to do a little bit more with her outside of the hour to two hours that we meet, ... but while we're in the session, we go over anything and everything."

Shannon watched Davis navigate a full course load on top of all of her extracurricular activities and claimed to have seen few, if any, signs of burnout. She said Davis just kept pushing, adding things to her already full days and weeks.

But Davis is, of course, still human. She does get tired and overwhelmed at times. When she does need help, Davis turns to her support system, which is thankfully very large thanks to the depth and breadth of her involvement. But it is Davis' sisters who are at her right hand the most, ready to overcome the distance between them with a text or phone call.

Make no mistake though, Davis regrets nothing. It might not have been how she imagined her college experience unfolding — Davis said she didn't even think she would end up at Pitt — but she wouldn't change a thing. These are her choices and Davis is going to make the most of them during her final year in Oakland.

"I didn't plan on it at all," Davis said. "At one point, I was working three jobs and I was like, 'Oh no, we can't do this.' ... But I don't regret it at all. I'm so happy that I went full-throttle, head in and tried everything because I definitely think that my outside the classroom experiences helped me inside the classroom and will help me in the professional world."