

believe him. (The first weeks of our freshman year were a good, sweet time; then *Black Panther* came to cinemas.) And then, a few months later, Tom will casually fly to Germany to do a TED Talk about his green-energy start-up back in Kenya.

Meanwhile in Botswana, my parents call me on WhatsApp and Skype. When my mother calls, it's often from my grandparents' farm, which she visits frequently despite the five-hour drive from the capital city; the phone signal crinkles because those wavelengths barely pass through those dry, yellow woods. When my father calls, he will excitedly tell me about how much he misses

## For me, the difficult thing about coming to Harvard is that I was raised to be a Motswana man.

my mother's beef stew and samp beans. The stew is a thick bubbling pot of an entire aisle of spices from different regions of the world; it's hard to say where and when its flavors begin and end, but it is not hard at all for the tongue to register them. (My father is a commercial airline pilot who also often adventures away from home, so he tastes the stew as infrequently as I do.)

I tell him about the best approximations of Mama's beef stew I can find on campus. The Harvard African Students Association hosts two events each year, called Fall Feast and Africa Night. It does not strike me as an exaggeration to say that all of us might perish without these endless platters of foods spanning the Continent. It's hard to say where and when their flavors begin and end, but our faces with their chomping gleams are description enough. I think the Ethiopian food is best, since the stews taste so close to those of my own home. Inevitably on these occasions, a Ghanaian and a Nigerian will throw—*friendly!*—insults concerning the ongoing Jollof Rice War, which has no winner in sight, plus no one outside of West Africa can seriously tell the difference except to say that we are pleased that our mouths are so full and good.

Food is a fun thing to talk about on the phone. Otherwise, there are negotiations to be had. I explain again what the American liberal-arts education system entails and why I can't take a whole semester of science classes exclusively, and also why I cannot graduate with an undergraduate degree in law, medicine, or business. I deal with money again, because the American dollar is 10

times or 50 times or whatever absurd amount times more powerful than my own currency and I need financial-aid statements sorted out again and *does anyone understand how to fill out these bloody tax forms?* I say that I'm doing fine and that it is cold. We then hug each other with our voices and drop the phone.

FOR ME, the difficult thing about coming to Harvard is that I was raised to be a Motswana man. My culture tells me that the greatest thing you can ever do is to take care of your family. But here, there is the deep, dark thing that happens when you grab a bunch of young, ambitious and nervous people and

stuff them into a place like this. People end up not really caring about one another. The fact that it is so cliché to say this implies the embarrassing plainness of its truth: we'll pick a work deadline over a friend; we'll find soft, smart ways of screwing people out of the leadership position that might get us a high-profile job after graduation; we'll pick who we think is worth talking to based on what they do and the people they hang around with. This is the simple story of Harvard. The larger story includes the innumerable things I am happy and grateful for, but the simple story remains at its center.

The simple story of being African is that we were taught to take care of each other.

On the night of this year's Yardfest, one of us had a violent interaction with the po-

lice and ended up in the hospital. We heard about it the next morning, hazy, hungover, and hurt. It would not have been so violent if the student had not been black. It would not have been so legally fearful if the student had not been African. The black and African undergraduates were disappointed, but not surprised. This is America—even if filtered through Harvard.

A night later, a group of African sophomores surprise my friend from South Africa with a birthday wine-and-chill in his room, but the night doubles up as a way of trying to make sense of it all, together.

The night is good. It reminds me of home. It reminds me of my family. It reminds me of the need to take care of each other. There is so much noise here at this small birthday party, and it is not the inexplicable Nigerian music, which, for reasons beyond my understanding, will always be played at our large gatherings. The noise is our laughter, so thick and gorgeous that we worry that the proctor of the DeWolfe dorms will come knock on the door to complain. *How are we so happy?* These voices will stay with us. Years from now, after earning our degrees, we will somehow find each other again, and we will hold each other's hands and look into each other's faces and ask if we remember us. And then we will laugh like we are laughing now. This loud, terrible laughter that carries across oceans, whispering, *Take care of each other.* ♥

Berta Greenwald Ledecy Undergraduate Fellow  
Tawanda Mulalu '20 has grown—and looks like his father.

## SPORTS

# Happy Returns

*Justice Shelton-Mosley needs only the tiniest space to go the distance.*

by DICK FRIEDMAN

AS THE PUNT hurtles through the sky, freshman Justice Shelton-Mosley '19 stands at the Harvard 14-yard-line, 40 yards downfield from the line of scrimmage. In many ways, his return began long before the ball was snapped: he has assiduously

watched film of Columbia's punter and read the scouting reports on him. "I look at all punts from previous games and see at what kind of angle they come off the kicker's foot," he says. "This punter, particularly, averaged 43 or 44 yards. And he mostly kicked it toward the left hash mark. In this

case he kicked it a little more toward the middle.”

Even as he tracks the ball, Shelton-Mosley takes a glance at the Lions’ gunners—the two opponents, one on either side of the scrimmage line, who are assigned to run full tilt down the field in hopes of arriving at Shelton-Mosley when (or even before) the ball does. “If they get a free release I know I have a lot less time,” he says. “But if our guys hold them up even a little, I know I have a shot.”



ENTERING his senior season, Shelton-Mosley, of Leverett House and Sacramento, looks to cement his status as Harvard’s most accomplished return man ever. His career punt-return average of 15.8 yards is more than four yards higher than that of the player in second place, Andrew Fischer ’16. Shelton-Mosley holds the school record for single-season return average: 19.0 yards, set in 2015, during his dazzling freshman season, and nearly matched last year, when his punt returns averaged 18.8 yards. He also has three punt returns for touchdowns, the most in Crimson history, and the longest such scoring play, 91 yards, which came last season in a 41-2 win over Georgetown. Two weeks later he had an 85-yarder in a 38-10 victory over Lafayette. These happy returns have come despite opposing coaches directing their punters to keep the ball out of his hands by kicking it far, far away from him, or putting so much hang time on their boots that he is forced to call for a fair catch. For his efforts in 2017, Shelton-Mosley was named to the All-Ivy first team and the STATS FCS (Football Championship Subdivision) All-America first team as a punt returner.

Harvard coach Tim Murphy has profound appreciation for the way number 17 can flip

**Arguably the Ivy League’s most dangerous offensive weapon, the Crimson’s return man and wideout Justice Shelton-Mosley ‘19 is a threat to score every time he touches the ball.**

the field, putting the Crimson offense in a much improved starting place. Murphy has had many crackerjack returners in Cambridge, among them the intrepid Fischer, Colby Skelton ’98, and Brian Edwards ’05. “Justice is as good a returner as we’ve had in my 25 years,” says Murphy (“Murphy Time,” November-December 2015, page 35). “He has outstanding physical skills. And he’s now a bigger, faster, stronger version of his freshman self.” (The 5-foot-10 Shelton-Mosley is now listed at 195 pounds.) “But he also has an incredible sixth sense of where to run the football.”

Shelton-Mosley agrees that his vision is the key. “Once the ball is in my hands, it’s really just what I see, and then I go from there,” he says. To a large degree, his skill is unteachable. But his high-school coach, Phil Grams, quantified it. Now the offensive coordinator at Lawrence University, Grams saw Shelton-Mosley score 88 touchdowns at Sacramento’s Capital Christian School and be heavily recruited by Football Bowl Subdivision schools such as Northwestern, Cal, and Duke. “I always told him, ‘If you can find that one inch



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of daylight, you're gonna come out of it with nobody left to tackle you," says Grams.

As a Crimson freshman, Shelton-Mosley averaged an eye-popping 33.1 yards on kickoff returns. The following season, hoping to cut down on injuries, the Ivy League moved kickoffs from the 35-yard line to the 40. The notion was to promote more kicks reaching the end zone, resulting in touchbacks, on which no tackles occur and the whistle is blown before there are many collisions. It seems to be working. In 2015, 12.4 percent of kickoffs resulted in touchbacks. In 2016, the number jumped to 44.1 percent, and last year it was 36.1. More significantly, according to the Ivy League office, in years before 2016, conference games averaged six to seven concussions a season. In 2016 there were none during Ivy games, and last year there were two.

When he first heard of the Ivy rules, "I was kind of disappointed," Shelton-Mosley admits. "On the other hand, it's a safer game, and that has a ripple effect on other conferences." (This year the NCAA as a whole has introduced an experimental rule under which a kickoff returner who is inside his 25-yard line can call for a fair catch, after which the ball will be brought to the 25 for the offense to start play.)

Shelton-Mosley is also the Crimson's most dangerous wide receiver. But as Harvard's offense has dropped off in the past two seasons, opposing defenses have been able to key on him, causing his production to drop from 48 catches and a 6.0-yard

**In the 24-3 loss to Yale last November, Shelton-Mosley was one of the Crimson's few bright spots, corraling a game-high seven receptions and bolting for an 18-yard punt return.**

average in 2016 to 36 last year, with a mere 3.6 yards per catch. Says Murphy: "I made an edict to our staff that we have to get him more touches in a game in [2018]. His ability to make plays, to make something out of nothing, is sort of unrivaled in the Ivy League right now and we have to capitalize on that more."

*On this Columbia punt, Harvard's play is labeled a "boundary return"—designed for Shelton-Mosley to get near the sideline and pick up blockers before turning upfield. He catches the ball, and with a quick cut leaves a would-be tackler in the dust and reaches the area next to the sideline. Then he begins to accelerate upfield. "Run like hell," he tells himself. "Run away from the defenders and don't go sideways."*

AS ANTHONY MOSLEY recalls it, the first time his son returned a punt in organized football was when he was six years old. "He took it to the house" (the football expression for running all the way to the end zone). "I think it was about 45, 50 yards."

Justice remembers that too, but he recalls something else. "I got in trouble because I showboated," he says. "I high-stepped to the end zone. I had seen NFL players do that." Anthony chastised him. "I never did that again," says Justice.

Anthony was a star running back at Fresno State, then went on to have a brief NFL career with the Chicago Bears. Now an athletic trainer, he brings an expert's eye to his son's abilities. "He is quicker than he is fast," says Anthony. "He's done some amazing things as far as his lateral movement and



**"I shocked myself, honestly": on a 42-yard return against Dartmouth last October, Shelton-Mosley improbably juked two onrushing Big Green coverage men.**

as far as his ability to plant and pivot off the same foot. I trained with [Bears Hall of Famer] Walter Payton and I actually taught Justice one of [Payton's] moves. In his next game he did it and I couldn't believe it. He did it without losing any speed. And I've seen him do that several times in his college career."

Anthony is not the only family member to help Justice hone his skills. "When I was seven or eight years old there was a big field in the middle of the apartment complex where we lived," he says. "My mom [Carla] and stepdad [Donnie Rogers] would take me out to the field and practice punt returns. They'd throw the ball up in the air and they'd run on me and I'd have to juke 'em. We did that my whole childhood."

"Now every time I go back to Sacramento, my dad and I go to a field. And sometimes I don't even have a ball. We'll take a water bottle, he'll throw it up in the air. I have to go catch it, make four or five moves, and take off for 60 yards."

*Gathering speed along the sideline, Shelton-Mosley runs into a logjam of humanity—friend and foe. "I just didn't want to go out of bounds," he says. "There was a guy actually trying to tackle me from out of bounds. I'm not sure how I escaped that. I did see a hole and I was going to do all I could to get to that opening and then burst out of it. I kind of saw the hole before I got going but I knew that if I kept pushing up, some of the Columbia guys would over-pursue and there would be an even better opening." The next thing anyone sees is a solitary figure ahead of the pack, running toward the end zone. It is Justice Shelton-Mosley.*

THERE IS some disagreement about which of Shelton-Mosley's returns is his most



amazing. Most think it was that 86-yarder at Columbia when he was a freshman. "How'd he do that?" yelled gobsmacked Lions play-by-play man Jerry Recco when Shelton-Mosley emerged on his way to the end zone.

Shelton-Mosley, however, points to a non-scoring play that to him was even more satisfying. It came in the third quarter of last season's 25-22 win over Dartmouth, and went for 42 yards. "I shocked myself, honestly," says Shelton-Mosley, who usually downplays his feats in the retelling. "The play wasn't even set up to be a return. It was actually supposed to be a punt block. But they kicked it about 40 to 50 yards and there's a [Dartmouth gunner] breathing down my throat. And I was able to make a move and juke him. And there was another guy right after, and I happened to juke him as well. By no means was I supposed to return that ball. That's a fair catch every single time."

**"His ability to make plays, to make something out of nothing, is sort of unrivaled in the Ivy League."**

How MUCH LONGER Shelton-Mosley will be able to do what he loves will depend to some degree on this season. He harbors NFL ambitions, but he is realistic. "There haven't been many skill guys in the league who have gone to Harvard," he says. Nevertheless, he is thrilled with his choice. "I was told that Harvard could give me the opportunity to embark on a new world," he says, and it has. An economics concentrator, he has enjoyed his summer internships in investment banking. Mergers and acquisitions, he says, "is where I could see myself long term."

That is, when he's not indulging his other passion: bass fishing, a hobby since childhood. "As I was walking to practice one day along the Charles, I saw a guy fishing," Shelton-Mosley says. "He pulled up a bass and I was shook. I asked one of my coaches, 'Hey, can I use one of your rods?' I've been fishing there ever since."

One way or another, Justice Shelton-Mosley will keep on catching. ♡

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