

## **The number 23 guided Sammy Baker through life**

Who was Sammy Baker, the young fitness influencer from Wetzlar who was shot dead by Amsterdam police on August 13? His mother and father are now talking about that.

The 23 was Sammy Baker's favorite number. It guided him through his life - until his tragic death far too early on August 13. Even as a talented little boy, Sammy wore 23 on his jersey when playing basketball, the back number of his great idol Michael "Air" Jordan. Two days after his 23rd birthday, Sammy was shot dead by Dutch police officers in Amsterdam under mysterious circumstances.

It is important to mother Justine (48) and father Kai (53) to talk about their son, to make clear what kind of person he was, what affected his life and what plans he still had. And that he was a young man from Wetzlar. For the first time, they talked about this with this newspaper.

The sympathy for Sammy's death and the great solidarity are overwhelming for mother and father. They still receive messages from all over the world, even from people who write that Sammy gave them courage and strength in difficult times. The young man from Wetzlar was active as a fitness influencer and mental coach. 170,000 people followed him and his motivational posts on his Instagram profile "sammy\_bkr." In a personal letter, Wetzlar's mayor Manfred Wagner expressed his deep sympathy.

For the parents, the loss of their beloved son is unbearable. Additionally, they are tormented by the many unanswered questions raised by the dramatic incident in the backyard of Amsterdam's neighborhood Nieuw West, where Sammy was torn away from his young life with three fatal shots. The parents who were also heard as witnesses are not allowed to talk about details of their investigation until the Dutch Rijksrecherche has completed its investigation. It is being investigated whether the intervention of the police officers and especially the use of firearms was justified or whether it was a case of failure, arbitrary action or police violence. Months may pass until the result is published. Then it will be clear whether the Amsterdam public prosecutor's office will press charges against the officers or not.

Justine and Kai hope for justice, well aware that it will not make their son alive again. "I expect those who are responsible to be made accountable," Justine says. She refers to "execution." The people who are responsible for her son's death should not be allowed to carry on as if nothing had happened. They are also concerned about protecting possible future victims, Kai says.

Sammy was born on August 11, 1997 in Giessen, a city near Frankfurt. Already then he was a pretty boy, tiny and small, his aunt Fabiola enthuses. Big dark eyes and strong dark hair. His father's great-grandparents had Jamaican roots. Father Kai reports a relationship to reggae legend Bob Marley, but by marriage. Sammy grew up bilingually- German-English. His parents separated when he was still a little boy.

He was lively, always active, his mother remembers. From the age of three, Sammy's great passion was basketball - with a constant drive to the basket. He had his first training session at the age of five in a mini team of TV Wetzlar and immediately broke a finger. But that didn't

stop him playing. At the age of nine, Sammy was awarded the title of "Most valuable Player"(MVP) at the summer camp of the Giessen 46ers. From 2012, he played for MTV Giessen in the premier league. One of his former coaches at TV Wetzlar, Sadion Hoxhallari, is still full of praise for the special talent and ambition. Sammy always stood out, was always lively, polite and friendly.

### **Sammy was a family man**

Still slim by the age of 16, Sammy stopped playing team sports and focused on fitness. "As boys are at that age, he wanted to go to the gym, building up muscles," says mother Justine. His "look," and "six pack" became more important. He was never rebellious during puberty.

2016 Sammy graduated from highschool "Goetheschule" in Wetzlar without any problems: Sports, language and music were subjects he particularly enjoyed. He then studied sports and languages in Giessen to become a teacher, then switched to environmental management. At the same time, he started a side business as a fitness coach, advertised for various brands and in 2019 appeared in a side role as an athlete in the SAT 1 soap "Meine Klasse - Voll das Leben".

What Sammy always stuck to was music, his second great passion. He got the talent from his father. "We were often jamming together," recalls the 53-year-old.

He introduced his son to instruments from an early age. First on the keyboard, Sammy later took drum lessons at music school and he also played bass and guitar. He particularly enjoyed rhythmic pieces. Sammy "inhaled" funk, soul and jazz. With a friend he also made a lot of electronic music, in times of Covid-19 increasingly under the label "Epiphysis", there were plans for a music label.

Sammy also had a passion for traveling. Justine: "He saw a lot of the world." Father Kai, who works for Lufthansa, is also primarily responsible for that. He mentions holidays spent together in Johannesburg, New York and Los Angeles, one of Sammy's favorite cities. Hong Kong and Singapore were firmly planned as destinations. Most recently, Sammy was particularly fascinated by Thailand, Justine knows. Because of the mentality there, but above all because of love. With Maetissa, who is studying psychology in Bangkok. With interruptions, he spent several months there until March 2020. It became a problem when the two could no longer see each other because of Corona, Sammy was stuck in Germany. During this phase, he spent a lot of time at home in Wetzlar, playing music, and they talked frequently and for a long time, Justine says. Sammy was a family man at heart, and as a young adult he became more and more interested in the big questions of life. He regularly wrote in a notebook. One of his last entries, "I am grateful for my family."

The weekend before Sammy left to Amsterdam to celebrate his birthday with friends, he had attended a Thai boxing match in Giessen with friends. Videos exist of the following visit to Café Lieblingsmensch". You can see just how full of life he was, what fun he was having," Justine says. Sammy had many plans, she says. Father Kai saw his son for the last time on Sunday, August 9, when he was visiting his grandma and great-grandma: "He wanted to go back to Bangkok, no doubt about that."

**"Mental, Health & Fitness" were Sammy's topics.**

As much as Sammy was traveling the world, Justine never needed to ask how her son was doing or what he was up to. All it needed was a quick look on Instagram, and she was up to date. Sammy, she says, was always polite and respectful, and even during their teenage years there were no problems. This all makes it even more unbelievable for Justine what happened in Amsterdam. Her son was an athlete through and through, health-conscious. He refused alcohol and smoking. When he was out with his friends, he was usually the designated driver. In Wetzlar, Sammy had a solid base of good friends. As an Instagram star, he added many close contacts in Germany and around the world. "Mental health & fitness" were Sammy's topics. He never really made a big thing out of his success, says father Kai, who admits that he was not aware of the actual dimensions.

For his 23rd birthday on August 11, Sammy had planned a special celebration. He wanted to spend his day in Amsterdam with friends, including a boat trip. Just as he had experienced it there six years ago during a vacation with Justine and her husband Armin (42). What exactly happened between August 11 and his death on August 13 remains unclear.

On the following weekend, his birthday party was planned in Wetzlar with his family, and he was very much looking forward to it.