

What about Kasandra Perkins?

Written by Julianne Malveaux, NNPA Columnist
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By now, it's old news that Kasandra Perkins was murdered by Kansas City Chiefs football player Jovan Belcher, who was her boyfriend and the father of her daughter. By now we've read about how great a teammate Belcher was, how dedicated to his girlfriend and daughter. We've read his hardscrabble story of moving from the University of Maine, hardly a football powerhouse, to a coveted slot in the NFL. Belcher has been humanized, even enshrined, as his friends have talked about him not having a violent bone in his body.

What about Kasandra? It has been disturbing that the news focused mostly on Jovan (yes, I know, he was the famous one), with a focus on Kasandra only later in the week. Her friends said they did not want her life to be overshadowed by the sympathetic coverage of Jovan.

While Jovan Belcher was clearly a troubled man, the bottom line is that Jovan Belcher murdered Kasandra Perkins. Not just shot her, he murdered her. And then he killed himself. Yes, this is a tragedy, but it is also a murder, so let's not use euphemisms, let's just call it what it is. The news reports that Belcher was angry because Kasandra Perkins went to a concert and came home at about one in the morning. But another report says that he was parked outside some other woman's house in the middle of the night. Go figure.

What do we know about Kasandra Perkins? The 22-year-old woman from Texas aspired to be a teacher and was studying at a local community college. She had a 3-month-old child, Zoey. She made friends easily and worked with other wives and girlfriends of Chiefs players. She enjoyed going out with friends. There is probably lots more to her story, but it has been scantily reported.

Nobody knows what goes on in a relationship except those who are in it. So it is also disturbing to see Belcher's friends take to the media to describe the relationship as troubled and to suggest that Kasandra is at fault for her own murder. According to some, she provoked her own murder by staying out late at night. Guess what? Belcher's mother was caring for their infant. Sounds like a control issue to me.

Too often, men beat and even kill women when they step outside their sphere of control. Women are beaten or killed because they didn't cook dinner, because they raised their voice, because they chose to spend time with friends or family, because, because. This violence does not know race, class or gender, though different groups have different levels of violence. While 1.5 million women experience domestic violence annually, African American women are 35 percent more likely than White women to be battered.

Without mentioning names, the Kansas City Chiefs called for a moment of silence for victims of domestic violence during the game that Jovan Belcher did not play. With football as the focus, they did not have the grace to mention Kasandra Perkins by name. It would have made a difference if they had. Despite the fact that Belcher was a member of the KC team, there is a villain and a victim in this incident.

This type of violence is such an epidemic that the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994. The act established an office in the Department of Justice works to prevent violence, and allocated \$1.6 billion to work on violence against women issues, including strengthening existing state laws and raising awareness of this issue. Now the law is up for

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reauthorization, and some Republicans are holding it up because they do not agree with protections for Native American women, immigrant women, and people in same-sex couples. We know that VAWA is effective. Since its passage, intimate partner violence has dropped by about 60 percent, but it didn't save Kasandra Perkins. If nothing else, her brutal murder reminds us why this act is so important.

Jovan Belcher had a temper, drank heavily, and had at least eight guns. Some say he had suffered multiple head injuries playing football. That's no excuse for a murder so brutal that he shot Kasandra nine times. And the stories about his supposed nonviolence is contradicted by some of his college behavior, including punching through a window when he was frustrated by a girlfriend who did not want to see him. This man was a serious candidate for anger management!

Kasandra Perkins isn't the only woman who has been murdered by a husband or boyfriend. According to the Department of Justice, three women are killed by spouses or partners every day. I don't want to hear about the tragedy of football player Jovan Belcher. I want to mourn Kasandra and the many women like her. And in her name, and in the name of others, we must all fight to get the Violence Against Women Act renewed.

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