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Chris Stewart stepped in for University of Alabama during wild season: 'I'm an incredibly blessed man'

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22 ALABAMIANS
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Chris Stewart, Crimson Tide Sports Network play-by-play announcer who filled in for Eli Gold, the voice of Crimson Tide football, during the 2022 season

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Chris Stewart filled in for legendary Alabama sports broadcaster Eli Gold in the Crimson Tide radio booth.

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By [Michael Casagrande | mcasagrande@al.com](mailto:mcasagrande@al.com)

This story is part of [AL.com](https://al.com)'s series "22 Alabamians who made a difference in 2022," highlighting people who have made our state a better place to live this year. Stories in this series will publish each weekday during December. Find all stories [in the series as they publish here](#), and read about the Alabamians who made a difference in 2021 [by clicking here](#).

In a year that mixed the surreal with the bittersweet for Chris Stewart, the afternoon of April 16 was perhaps the perfect intersection of these conflicting emotions.

There he stood in the Bryant-Denny Stadium radio booth calling the A-Day Game on the Crimson Tide Sports Network. April 16 isn't just any day on Stewart's calendar. Four years to the day earlier, Stewart suffered a massive stroke -- the first of a few brushes with death in the months to come. So, in one sense, his presence in that booth was another triumph in his long road back.

But the overriding reason he had *that* role on that day was the bitter part. Eli Gold, the voice of Crimson Tide football since 1988, had health issues that kept him from calling the spring football game that April afternoon in Tuscaloosa. Those undisclosed troubles ultimately sidelined the golden-throated Brooklyn native for the full football season.

So it was ultimately up to the University of Montevallo graduate to talk the Alabama fanbase through what became a wild and occasionally uncomfortable season. It helped that Stewart was far from an unknown to this audience. He's called Alabama basketball games for the network since 2000 and football games on the old pay-per-view broadcasts while hosting a number of other broadcast roles around the state.

"Even for an A-Day Game, it was a special occurrence," Stewart says. "Then when the season started, that was something that was very different. And I guess for me, having known John Forney, to know Paul Kennedy and then working alongside Eli as I have for so long, to be just the fifth person since 1953 to do the play-by-play for an official Alabama football radio network broadcast was an incredible experience."

The listenership has been great with feedback, Stewart said, while noting everyone misses Gold. Part of his weekly duties is hosting the weekly Nick Saban Radio Show and every week Stewart pointed out he was filling in for his legendary teammate.

"And I do think, given my own struggles health-wise and (the listenership) having been along with me for that journey, I think they understood it was special for me to be healthy enough to do it and to be able to do it," Stewart said.

It began with the stroke on April 16, 2018. Doctors told Stewart it was a total fluke that he had two blood clots on his brain. One of the doctors later told him the device they use to bust clots was on its maximum setting "the clots weren't budging and there was no Plan B." It was on one of the last attempts that the clot eventually cleared.

A little more than a year later, he was back in the hospital with widow-maker-level blockage that required heart bypass surgery. It was at 95% blockage but the successful surgery wasn't the end to that chapter. More than a week after the bypass, he started feeling feverish.

To this day, he has no memory of the next month. An infection led to pneumonia, sepsis, MRSA, rhabdomyolysis and "every major organ shut down." Stewart's wife Christy was calling friends telling them they needed to get to the hospital because the end was near.

Stewart wasn't done yet, though. He spent 91 days in the hospital -- two weeks in a coma -- before he could go home from this third brush with death. That date was Nov. 27, 2019.

Sitting in the Bryant-Denny broadcast booth calling Alabama's 49-27 win over Auburn, Stewart knew the following day was the third anniversary of his hospital liberation.

"To go from being my last day in the hospital three years ago to doing the play-by-play for the Iron Bowl," Stewart said. "I'm an incredibly blessed man."

Michael Casagrande is a reporter for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter [@ByCasagrande](#) or on [Facebook](#).

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