

Shoreham to have first 'Lax Out Cancer' day



Detail of lacrosse sticks with pink heads to signify an upcoming charity game for cancer awareness. Each head has the initials of a cancer survivor or victim. (Photo by Joseph D. Sullivan / May 11, 2008)

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Kevin DeFranco was at lacrosse practice with his Shoreham-Wading River teammates, but his mind was noticeably elsewhere and with someone else.

"He was forgetting slides and not communicating," coach Tom Rotanz said. "He was just in a different zone."

He asked the defender about his lack of concentration.

"You could see he was welling up," Rotanz said. "He goes, 'It's been three years since my dad died.'"

DeFranco's father, Anthony, died in 2005 at the age of 52 from a rare salivary gland cancer.

"I tried to keep a low profile about it," DeFranco said. "I didn't want to distract the team with it. It was a tough day and it comes once a year, thank God."

The senior captain will again be reminded of his father's death on Wednesday, but in a different and welcome way.

His stick head will be pink and bare his father initials in white when Shoreham hosts Bayport-Blue Point at 5:30 p.m. His teammates will also be using pink stick heads, which have on them the initials, divided in threes, of nine people close to the program who have died from or have suffered from cancer. The goalies' heads have all nine.

"We get big crowds for games and people's heads are going to be somewhere else," DeFranco said. "They are going to be seeing the pink heads and know we are playing for these people."

It is part of Shoreham's first Lax Out Cancer day. They will look to raise \$10,000 from the sale of program ads, pink T-shirts, raffles and a small admission fee. Proceeds will be divided between three charities, the Make a Wish Foundation, the Ronald McDonald House and The Friends of Matt Baisley, which was set up in memory of the 2004 Shoreham grad who died of Ewing's Sarcoma in 2005.

"The thing that started getting me thinking about it was when we had our ring ceremony back at Thanksgiving, the Wednesday prior to that Saturday we found out that one of the fathers of our seniors who had graduated, Peter Courtney, had died of cancer," Rotanz said.

Rob Courtney and Baisley will be among those remembered on the stick heads along with Kim Giles of Stony Brook, the aunt of junior Nik Mullen, Joe Sullivan of West Islip, the brother of goalie coach John Sullivan, and Mario Motroni of Queens, grandfather of junior Joey Lustgarten.

"I think it's every program," Rotanz said. "It's not like it's people all from Shoreham."

Juniors Troy Zangle and T.J. Heuer have seen their mothers survive the disease. Carol Zangle is a year survivor of breast cancer and Barbara Heuer is free of appendix cancer for a year and half. Their initials and those of Gerald Logan, father of JV goalie Gerald Logan, another survivor, will also be on the heads. Each family will receive one and the others will be donated to a Long Island PAL clinic for children with special needs.

"We live down the street so they go out to lunch every once and a while now," Zangle said of his and Heuer's mothers. "She sent her a card when she found out."

A similar bond can be found amongst the teammates.

"I knew I could go to Troy or Kevin at anytime," Heuer said.

Help is not always easy to ask for, but always there.

"Basically we are letting them come to us and just let them know that we are there," DeFranco said. "It's a team. It's a support system."