

W19 Sports writing portfolio

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Generals honor teammates' mother as she battles cancer

By Tommy Keeler Jr.

QUICKSBURG – Tears were flowing at Dick Krol Field at General Stadium on Tuesday evening.

One by one, members of the Stonewall Jackson's girls soccer team went up to teammates Virginia and Julia Biller on the sidelines of the field and delivered a flower. The Biller sisters, along with their brother Braxton, then turned to their mother Jennifer and handed her the flowers. It was part of an emotional ceremony in between the boys and girls soccer game in honor of Jennifer Biller, 48, who has been battling colorectal cancer since September 2017.

The Generals wore purple uniforms and there were purple streamers and purple balloons throughout the stands. They chose the color purple because it is the universal color for cancer.

Jennifer Biller said it was a special and memorable night for her.

"I've been watching these girls both (junior varsity) and varsity play since they were 4 and 5," she said. I love all the girls – JV and varsity. So it meant the world to me for them to do this because they're really special to me."

Jennifer Biller, who works as a gifted resource specialist at Signal Knob Middle School and Strasburg High School, said when she was first diagnosed with colorectal cancer, her doctor told her there would be a year of treatment. She said she went through radiation, then surgery and then chemotherapy. Her last chemo treatment was Aug 30. In January, she had a CAT scan that showed there was a recurrence in her abdomen.

She said she has been undergoing a different type of chemo this time and has visited Georgetown University Hospital and Johns Hopkins Hospital for second opinions. Jennifer Biller said that at the end of the summer they will see how her treatments are going to see if she needs to have surgery again.

She said her three children – Virginia, Julia and Braxton – and her husband Jerry have all been supportive. Julia, a sophomore at Stonewall Jackson, wants to go into medicine so she learned how to do some things for her mom from the home health nurse.

"The family has just been a huge support," Jennifer Biller said. "They've stayed busy with all their activities, which I think helps a lot because there's constantly something going on. You're not just kind of sitting around. It's also nice that they're all three teenagers because they can help but also they can get rides (to) places and that kind of stuff, and I don't have to worry about all of that."

Stonewall Jackson coach Ginny Dellinger said that when the team first found out that Jennifer Biller's cancer had returned she could tell her players were upset and felt helpless because there was only so much they could do. Stonewall Jackson senior Casey Gibson, who is Virginia's best friend, came to Dellinger and wanted to know if there something the team could do to help the family.

So Dellinger and Casey Gibson's mom Mary talked it over and decided to do the Cancer Awareness Night and the special ceremony held on Tuesday night.

The team sold 120 T-shirts and together with some money donated by Valley Sports Connection, the sporting goods store in New Market that made the T-shirts, made \$544. The money was donated to the American Cancer Society in the names of Jennifer Biller and Martin Hernandez, a freshman at Stonewall Jackson who has brain cancer. Martin was not able to take part in Tuesday's ceremony.

On the back of the T-shirts, which many in attendance Tuesday had on, says: "You have been assigned this mountain to show others that it can be moved."

Jennifer Biller said Dellinger read her the quote the first time she was diagnosed with cancer and she really loved it.

"There's a verse in the Bible that I love that talks about if you believe that you can move this mountain and tell it to move, it will move," Jennifer Biller said. "So it's very special to me for that."

Dellinger said that she wanted to make sure all of the players were involved in the ceremony on Tuesday, which is why she came up with the idea to have each of them hand out a flower to Virginia and Julia Biller.

"I wanted our players to feel supported, Virginia and Julia," Dellinger said. "So I thought that for each teammate to give them something and then they could turn and give those to their mom, and it worked out really well. I don't think the girls expected to be so touched. They came in all smiles and happy and there were a few tears being shed as it went on. So I think it was a good touch. It worked out really well."

Virginia said it meant a lot to her to have her teammates do this for her and her family.

"After the ceremony tonight, all of them came up and gave me hugs and my sister as well," she said. "Some of them were even tearing up because we are such a close family unit. So that's nice to have them for sure."

During the game, there were a limited number of bells that were sold to fans in the stands. After the Biller family received their flowers, the public address announcer asked for anyone who had battled cancer to stand and remained standing, then for anyone who had ever lost a loved one to stand, then for anyone who has someone they care about who is battling cancer to stand, and finally for anyone who wants to see cancer defeated to stand. Everyone was standing by then, and they were asked to ring their bells, stomp their feet and make noise to show their support.

"The idea was to get the whole crowd to make noise in support – and make them feel it," Dellinger said. "What a better way to do that than with loud noise, because you feel it – it's a physical thing."

Jennifer Biller said that she hasn't missed a soccer game last season or this season. All three of her children play soccer. Both Virginia, a senior, and Julia play on the girls varsity squad. Braxton, an eighth-grader, plays on the junior varsity boys squad.

"Watching the kids play soccer is something I look forward to," Jennifer Biller said. "When I first got diagnosed, I had my first chemo I think a week before their first game, and I had had surgery. I was still uncomfortable sitting, but I came and sat in a camp chair to be there at the game. I won't miss a game."

On Tuesday, the night was made even more special as both Virginia and Julia scored a goal as part of Stonewall Jackson's 8-0 win over Page County.

Virginia scored the first goal of the game and said it was definitely a good feeling.

"It went right in and I was like, 'ahh I'm so happy,'" Virginia said. "...It did mean a lot to me to get the (goal) and for mom. First goal – it was for her."

Julia's goal came with two minutes left in the opening half and it was the first goal of her varsity career.

"I wasn't expecting to score a goal," Julia said. "I'm not one of the top scorers, so it was really shocking for me. I was really happy that I scored the goal on this night of all the nights to score. It was a good feeling."

Jennifer Biller said that throughout the last year and a half she hasn't shied away from talking openly to people about it. She said her doctor told her that this is the only type of cancer that nobody should have because a colonoscopy would have detected it and they could have treated it before it turned into cancer.

She also started a blog on a web site called CaringBridge - <https://tinyurl.com/y4ejkt8>, where she shares her story and give updates on her progress.

Jennifer Biller said that she's learned that it's important to talk to people about it and let people help you in any way they can.

"I have the mindset if anybody offers to do something or brings me something, I let them," she said. "Because if they are reaching out to me and they have a positive experience, then hopefully they'll do it more to other people."

Virginia said she and her family were overwhelmed by the love and support given by her teammates on Tuesday.

"We are very appreciative of this event," she said. "It's very special for all of us. Of course, I had no expectations of this. I never expected it. I never thought that they would do something like this. It really does mean the world that they decided to put this together."

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Stonewall Jackson mourns death of longtime coach Krol

By Tommy Keeler Jr.

Stonewall Jackson High School and the community lost a local football legend on Tuesday night when longtime football and track and field coach Dick Krol passed away.

Stonewall Jackson Principal Mike Dorman said that Krol's son posted the news on Facebook on Wednesday morning.

"Dick was a pillar of this community and school for a long time," Dorman said in a phone interview Wednesday afternoon. "From way back in the 80s up through now, he was pretty revered."

Krol, who was 75, came to Stonewall Jackson in 1987 and was the head coach of the Generals for 28 years. Dorman, who played football for Krol and is a 1989 Stonewall Jackson graduate, said he can still remember the first time he met Krol during the summer of 1987.

"Evidently, he had just gotten the job," Dorman recalled. "I had got an early slot for the (sports) physicals – they would give them here at school. I was one of the first kids he met here, if not the first, I think he told me. You know, any time you meet somebody for the first time you just kind of feel them out but he was jovial and upbeat and he was excited about being at Stonewall."

The Generals had plenty of success on the football field, winning 142 games and sending teams to regional championships and state semifinal berths in 1996, 1997 and 1999. He won over 300 games in his coaching career.

Krol's teams were known for their grit and fight and hard-nosed play. They typically ran the ball the majority of time on offense and had a stout defense.

He stepped down after the 2014 season but stayed on as the school's track and field coach. Krol has been the track and field coach, along with Debbie Ritchie, for the past 32 years. He led the boys team to the state championship in 2012.

Krol has been battling throat cancer for the last two years and due to his health was only able to make it to a few of the track and field practices and meets last season.

Stonewall Jackson girls basketball coach Jeff Burner said that he believes that Krol's style of coaching had an influence on all of the coaches at the school.

"I think all of us have been influenced by him coaching-wise," Burner said. "We try to take that kid and make them tough and have them be disciplined. We take kids who sometimes aren't the greatest athletes and try to milk every ounce of ability and talent out of them and get them to believe in each other. And I think that's the thing that he probably did better than anyone."

While Krol had plenty of success as a coach, he will be most remembered for how much he cared about the students and athletes at Stonewall Jackson.

Stonewall Jackson Athletic Director Mike Lenox said that Krol was always supportive and helpful to him since he showed up at the school.

"Ever since I got here almost 10 years ago, he kind of looked after me – he looked after everybody," Lenox said. "He would always put himself second and make sure that things went as smooth as possible.

"The first time that I sat at this desk (as athletic director) he walked in and said let me know if I can do anything for you. That's always how Dick was. He put himself second, he wanted to make sure that the people that were around him were taken care of."

Dorman said that Krol had a big impact on his life and will not be forgotten.

"He's been there for me just basically every step of the way for most of all of my life," Dorman said. "He helped me get a job, to be honest with you, in this county way back when. He's been a mentor through most of my career. When I needed help or advice about something, Dick was always there."

Burner has seen first-hand the effect Krol can have even on younger kids. Burner's daughter, Ocie, 8, started a bond with Krol after she noticed he was wearing the same shoes that her grandfather had a number of years ago.

Burner said Ocie would get a hug from Krol every day after school during basketball and track seasons until Krol retired in 2014. Two years later, Krol was an assistant football coach at Page County and

promised Ocie that he would be there when she got off the bus at Stonewall Jackson High School the first Friday he had off.

"The first Friday that he was off he was waiting here with me at the bus stop," Burner said. "She came flying off that bus. ...She ran and jumped into his arms."

Burner said that Krol was at a junior varsity football game earlier this season and he called his mother to bring Ocie by so that she could see Krol.

Lenox said one of the things that Krol was known for was doing the laundry for the football team every Sunday night during the season.

"The jerseys and uniforms would already be laid out when the kids would get here on Monday morning," Lenox said. "You're like, 'Who did that?', and it was Dick. There was always a saying: 'Was he sleeping here? Did he have a bed in the back somewhere?'"

Dorman said that since he wasn't still coaching football, it hasn't had the biggest impact on the students, but members of the track and field team have taken it hard at school.

"It's been kind of somber, sad," Dorman said.

Burner said it probably hit the faculty harder than anyone at the school because so many of them had worked with Krol for a number of years.

Dorman said that Krol's son and only child Scott indicated that there would be no funeral because that's what his father wanted. Dorman said Scott Krol said they might do a celebration of life at some point in the future. Dorman said if the family wanted it, the school may do something in Dick Krol's honor down the road.

Burner said Dick Krol will be remembered greatly at Stonewall Jackson.

"Obviously, he was sort of a legend here," Burner said. "So I certainly hope that his impact, I know his impact is going to be long-lasting because he had so many kids that he had such a profound impact on in their lives and in some cases some of those kids' kids because he was here that long."

Last year, the school renamed their football field Dick Krol Field at General Stadium. Dick Krol was in attendance, even wearing his 25-year-old Stonewall Jackson football hat that he wore at almost every game he coached at Stonewall Jackson.

Dorman said that he's glad that the humble Krol was able to be a part of the ceremony and see the stadium be renamed in his honor.

"That meant everything because we wanted him to see the culmination of his career and the lives he touched because he's a very humble man," Dorman said. "I don't think he realized the impact he had on the kids here at this school over the years."

During the ceremony to rename the stadium, Stonewall Jackson girls basketball coach Jeff Burner read the announcement, which he wrote himself, on Krol and what he meant to the school and community.

"Coach Krol's reach on Stonewall athletics and our community goes far beyond his own teams," Burner said in the announcement. "His tough, simple formula using the heart and soul of Stonewall athletics to grind out effort and success has been replicated across many programs. More importantly, coach Krol has positively impacted the lives of so many of his students not only in the classroom but also behind the scenes in their private lives. His influence is so profound in our community that it is part of our daily lives and we don't even realize it. His career has been filled with thousands of loads of

laundry, hundreds of nicknames that will stick with people today, and multitudes of endearing relationships with athletes, students and co-workers. Tonight we honor a lifetime of giving his best to all around him, to providing a discipline for living your life, for his tough-love style, and for having a heart 2,000 times bigger than what he likes to show.”

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Lack of fun, positive energy drove Warren County football player away

By Tommy Keeler Jr.

FRONT ROYAL – Isaiah Frame wanted his senior season of football at Warren County High School to be fun but after a fiery locker room speech by Warren County head coach Brian Bush on Nov. 8, Frame had reached his limit.

Frame, the team’s leading tackler this season, decided to not come back to the team for its scheduled playoff game on Nov. 15. He was one of roughly 20 players who quit the team after the 39-8 loss to Skyline on Nov. 8.

“Really, what he said wasn’t all that bad but I think the main reason some of us quit was because he mostly took the fun out of it,” Frame said on Tuesday afternoon. “We didn’t have fun anymore. I feel like he pushed the whole (we are a) family thing too much to where it never actually kind of happened. I quit mainly because we didn’t have fun as a family.”

The Wildcats (2-8) gave up their Region 3B playoff appearance on Nov. 11 after having only 23 players, most of whom were called up from the junior varsity squad, show up for practice. They were replaced in the playoffs by Independence, which lost to top-seeded Goochland, 42-6, on Nov. 15.

Frame said that some of Bush’s comments to the team after the game were upsetting.

“When he came into the locker room and said that he was going to find 11 guys that actually want to play, and I know me and a couple of other kids that actually tried every single play of the game – it kind of shut us down because we were actually trying,” Frame said. “Then for him to say that we don’t deserve to be in the playoffs, that killed us because I was looking forward to the postseason and actually trying to do something.”

Bush said he feels that some of the players took the things he was saying the wrong way in his speech after the Skyline loss.

“To me, I’ve always been a positive person,” Bush said from the coaches’ office on Tuesday afternoon. “The style of coaching that I have is something that I felt like as a player I would want to play for. At that moment (after the Skyline loss), I felt like that there were some guys in that locker room that probably weren’t giving their best effort. And instead of calling anybody out and

belittling anybody, I addressed the whole team. I wish they would have heard what I was saying and not how I was saying it. But at the end of the day, they're high school kids and some are going to take it one way and others are going to take it another way. It was upsetting to notice the ones that took it in the wrong way and didn't really hear what I was trying to get across. But not once did I point anybody out or talk down to anybody. I just wanted to get the intensity level up from some of the key players that needed to bring more to the team. And like I said, there were quite a few players out there that were trying to play the game of football and give everything they have. And football's the ultimate team sport, you need 11 out there on the field doing their job at the same time, and if you don't have all 11, then the results are never satisfying, never successful."

Bush said that he did tell the players that if they didn't want to be a part of the team going into the playoffs they could "pack your stuff up and we will find 11 guys that give us everything they have." Bush said that he didn't throw anyone out of the locker room but some players did leave on their own accord.

"The way I was addressing the team there were a few that were taking it a little more harsh than others," Bush said. "The few that weren't really buying in and listening to what I had to say they decided to leave the locker room."

Frame said that he thought about things over the weekend and decided it was best to quit the team. He said that he didn't talk to all of the other players that quit but did know of at least two who were waiting to see what he would do.

"I know that two other kids quit because I was quitting," Frame said. "So they basically waited to see what decision I made because they didn't want to be the only ones to quit. So they just followed in my footsteps."

Frame said that the biggest thing that upset him during the season was he felt Bush wasn't positive enough with the team.

"Mainly, after a game if we lost, or even if we won, most of the time it was put on us players and we got shot down and then he never actually brought us back up," Frame said. "Because most coaches will shoot you down but they will bring you back up eventually."

Warren County senior wide receiver/defensive back Kohl Baugher said he didn't quit the team but didn't agree with some of the things Bush said after the Skyline loss.

"Some things I was really against (in Bush's locker room speech), but at the same time I knew what he was talking about, where he was going with it," Baugher said. "Some people did take it the wrong way, but he has been preaching (the same things) since the very first practice."

Baugher said some of the players were upset with Bush's play calling. Bush likes to be aggressive and goes for it quite a bit on fourth down. Baugher said that many of the players would have rather kicked a field goal or maybe even punted instead of going for it. He said when they didn't make it on fourth down, at times it would generally bring the team down.

Although, Baugher did say that, in his opinion, Bush did a good job of being positive with the team and bringing them up even after tearing them down in the locker room or on the field. Baugher said that in his eyes Bush has always been there for the players and likes having him as a coach.

Bush said that he doesn't regret anything that was said or how he said it in the locker room after the loss to Skyline but he does regret not addressing some team issues late in the season that had been boiling over throughout the year. Bush said now the team has to find a way to move on and move forward.

"Now we get the guys that want to be here, get them in the weight room," Bush said. "We get them back and as a family, we take it in baby steps. The guys that were here and were ready to go in the playoff game, we get those guys back and we try to learn from this and move forward."

Frame, who is also a standout wrestler at Warren County, said he doesn't have any regrets about quitting.

"I don't really regret it," Frame said. "It sucks to have it end that way but I feel like it was for the better."

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