

Sidelined cancer survivor becomes manager of the girl's lacrosse team
By Jenna Thrift

BRAUER POWER

SPOTLIGHT

What's a common stereotype in girls lacrosse?



"A stereotype for girls in lacrosse would be that they're more aggressive than guys. I've watched guys and girls games and the girls seem to get hurt more often," **Cecilia Ollis**, 9, said.



"In lacrosse, people think girls aren't good or that it shouldn't be a sport, but it definitely is because it's good for fitness issues," **Parker Snyder**, 12, said.



"In girls lacrosse, there is a stereotype since they don't have the physical checks or what guys do, everybody thinks it is easier, even though [there's] a lot of running and strength," **Grace Denny**, 11, said.

The angel statue stands on desk, a green ribbon draped across its chest. A green ribbon that symbolizes the junior's two-year struggle. A green ribbon that stands for her strength. But also a green ribbon that represents Hodgkin's lymphoma, the disease that would end her lacrosse career.

Still, the angel stands dressed in green, giving **Brauer Dowd**, 11, hope.

"I was scared, but then I knew that everything was going to be a part of God's plan. It was all going to turn out good in the end," Dowd said.

Lacrosse had been a dream for Dowd. When Dowd was in sixth grade, she began watching the sport on TV with her dad. She hoped to one day be just like the girls she saw on the screen by joining Wando's team.

"I liked how it's rougher than most girl sports that I saw. Most of the time when it's girl on girl, it's not necessarily like as rough as lacrosse is," Dowd said.

One of her closest friends, **Molly Kerr**, 11, had known Dowd since sixth grade and had coped with it all.

"It was scary because I feel like I haven't experienced having someone that close to me have something like that before and I didn't know what the outcome would be," Kerr said.

Dowd's radiation surgery at the end of her sophomore year to remove the cancer resulted in avascular necrosis in her hips, which didn't allow blood to flow to her bones. Her doctors told her that she would not be able to play lacrosse—or any sport, for that matter—for the rest of her life.

"Everyone's been really supportive, trying to get my mind off of it. The lacrosse team is really welcoming to me even though I couldn't be playing on the field with them. They still took me in as a part of the team," Dowd said.

"THEY MADE ME FEEL LIKE I HAD A REASON TO BE THERE...AND NOT JUST BECAUSE I'M A CANCER KID."

Giving up a sport she loved so much was one of the hardest moments in Dowd's life, the junior said.

"I would definitely say it was for the better. It sucked going through it, but I wouldn't change it at all because it's made me who I am today and I'm grateful for that," Dowd said.

Luckily for Dowd, head coach **Brooke Black** offered her a spot as a manager of the team. Since she could no longer play, she felt that this was a way for her to stay connected to her friends and the sport that had been a part of her life for such a long time.

"All of the coaches really try to include me as much as they can [and] think of little things for me to do.

They made me feel like I had a reason to be there and not just because they felt bad, that they had to do it because I'm a cancer kid. They really wanted me to be there," Dowd said. "It gave me a better, like, outlook on the sport because I've gotten to watch so much of it now. Instead of play

that, like, I can point out things to girls that I've noticed just from watching."

Kerr noticed Dowd's resilience through this whole experience, which she says is one of the most inspiring traits of her friend.

"She's been really tough through it all and that's just super admirable. She stays really firm in God and her family has a very strong faith and I know that this just strengthens it," Kerr said.

Dowd continues to be a positive influence to the girls lacrosse team, her friends, and even her coaches, throughout the hardships she has faced.

"She has made me grateful for my health and my children and made me realize that family is first and family is important. I would feel really blessed if my daughter ends up like her," Black said.



photographer o. wander

SHOWING PRIDE: (above) **Bridget Connors**, 11, cradles up the field as the team gains possession in the final play. "When I have the ball, I always search the field to find any potential plays to make. If the play is successful, we like to celebrate. We usually give each other a hard stick five or we jump and scream," Connors said.

