

‘PRAYING FOR A MIRACLE’: Tennis and hockey players, others, provide support for Zach Hunter

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ALTON – The **East Alton Ice Rink** was filled with prayer and hope on Saturday morning for Zach Hunter, 16, a Marquette High School tennis player and Alton hockey team member.

Hunter was seriously injured in an April 1 auto accident and has been in a coma in a St. Louis hospital after surgery to relieve swelling of the brain.

Marquette Catholic High School boys tennis coach Mike Walters said on Friday they did hear a report that blood and oxygen are still flowing to his brain, which is very positive.

Marquette Catholic tennis player Nick Berkenbile perhaps summed up best what the prayer vigil on Saturday morning meant to those in attendance with these words: “We are praying for a miracle and I know it can happen.”

“It was amazing to see everyone come out here and support Zach and his family,” he said. “I loved the speeches of the coaches, they were very inspirational. They were saying Zach is a very strong-willed player and didn’t like to lose. He always made practice fun. He always made us smile and laugh. We have new tennis shirts we will now wear for him every match.”

Jake Bohn, an Alton hockey player, played with Zach all of last year and became close to him.

“His dad sent out a prayer he wanted us all to read and we read it and keep in touch with each other,” Bohn said. “We make sure we are all informed. For some of us it is not the first time something like this happened. Our past teammate **Jordan Klope** died in 2012 after an accident. It is not easy having something like this a second time. Jordan died immediately. This one is a little different as Zach is in a hospital and has severe injuries but he is still alive.”

Kristi McHatton, organized the Saturday event. She said several organizations were wanting to do something for the family and she came up with this idea.

“Let’s unite as one,” she thought. “We compete on ice but when things like this happen we unite as one.”

That happened on Saturday with players from Edwardsville, East Alton-Wood River, Collinsville, Marquette Catholic and Jersey attending the vigil.

“I received message after message and phone call after phone call about this event,” **Kristi McHatton** said. “The family needs us right now. I have printed off the Saint Anthony’s prayer that Zach’s father has asked everybody to say and gave that to everybody today so they can have that wherever they are.”

Tom McHatton, her son, and an East Alton-Wood River hockey player, said, “I played against him and I was on teams with him three or four times as a kid. I just hope he gets

out of this. I hope I see him back on the ice soon. Everyone here at the service wants him to pull out of it. We are all pray



ing for the family."

Mike Walters said it was great to see all the people come on Saturday and pray for Zach and his family.

“A lot of juniors were taking the ACT or it would have been completely full,” he said. “What the other tennis teams have done is amazing. Edwardsville, Granite City, Jersey and Alton High School tennis teams all sent their love and prayers.”

Walters said he has a profound thought for Zach: “My hope is Zach returns to playing hockey and tennis and is able to go on to school and become the man most of us think he will. **I encourage people to pray as much and as often as they can.**”

Berkenbile had some meaningful closing words: “I want people to keep praying for Zach.”

As one by one the nearly 300 people filed out of the hockey rink on Saturday, that same thought seemed to be on each and every person’s mind.

“I want everyone to keep praying for him,” Berkenbile said. “I miss him a lot. We have been saying prayers every day at Marquette. We are praying for a miracle and I know it can happen.”

Bohn said this for his teammate: “There is hope and I truly believe he will come out of this.”



