

The Marquette family comes together: Friends, family and teammates mourn the loss of Zachary Hunter

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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EAST ALTON - Friends and family of 16-year-old **Zachary Hunter** once went to the **East Alton Ice Arena** to see him play hockey, none of them could have anticipated going there to mourn him.



Hunter perished Sunday afternoon from injuries sustained in an April 1 accident in rural Jersey County. Hunter and his tennis partner, **Jonathan Claywell**, were injured in the crash following training at **Principia College** in **Elsah**. Hunter was airlifted to **Barnes Jewish Hospital**, where he remained in a coma until his death. He was a student at **Marquette Catholic High School** in Alton.

After hearing news of his death, **Kristi McHatton**, whose son, **Tyler McHatton**, played hockey with Hunter, arranged a candlelight vigil and balloon release in Hunter's honor. It was held in the parking lot of the East Alton Ice Arena in Eastgate Plaza. As many as 400 of Hunter's friends, family and classmates were in attendance.

Friends remembered Hunter as being “goofy, funny and confident.” **Tyler McHatton** recalled being nearly kicked out of several restaurants during outing with Hunter due to their laughter and goofy antics.

“We would go to Fazoli's after practice and pretend we didn't have any bread sticks,” Tyler McHatton recalled. “We would actually have about 30, and we would take them with us to the game. Those would pretty much make up our meal.”

Jake Bohn, who was the varsity captain of Hunter's hockey team, said he only knew Hunter for a season and a half, but it was enough to understand his spirit and personality.

“He had something to say, good or bad, to get everyone fired up,” he said before the vigil. “Every time he scored a goal, he had a grin on his face, which said, 'all of you can do this. Show me up.’”

Bohn spoke on behalf of Hunter at the vigil, following a blessing from Marquette Catholic High School chaplain, **Fr. Bill Kessler**. **Kessler** said he has been assisting students with their grieving process during this trying time.

“I've been walking through it with the students and listening,” Kessler said. “We prayed for the family during Mass, and I visited with Zack and his family while he was in the hospital.”



Paula Mattix-Wand, who runs **Campus Ministry** at the school said the tragedy has really awakened the extended “Marquette family.”

“Zack was popular, and an accomplished athlete,” she said. “Even those who didn't know him have been touched by the outpouring of care and concern. We talk about the Marquette family a lot, but now they are getting a chance to see it in action.”

Marquette Catholic High School Principal **Mike Slaughter** also thanked the community for the outpouring of support following the news of Zack Hunter's passing.

“It's a sad day not just for the Marquette family, but for the entire community,” Slaughter said before the vigil. “We are joined by our friends from Alton High School as well as the other clubs Zack played for. We've also been receiving such an outpouring of support from several schools across the area; both private and public, and secondary as well as elementary. This is a reoccurring nightmare for so many different schools across the area, not just for ours. I can't think of a school that has been immune to it.”

Bohn said Zack Hunter's death was not the first to plague his hockey team. The 2012 death of 15-year-old **Jordan Klope** in a similar crash in Jersey County also hit him hard. Bohn said he would help the younger players on the team cope with the loss of Zack Hunter through remembering how it felt for him to lose a teammate when he was a young player.

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The vigil concluded with a balloon release led by Fr. Kessler and some touching words from Hunter's father, **Scott Hunter**. Scott Hunter described his son as talented and thanked everyone for the tremendous support given to their family following the terrible news.

“He was a pain... to his coaches, and he was a pain... to me too, but I loved him for it and will try to honor his memory every day,” Scott Hunter said after the balloon release. “I hope you all do the same.”

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