

Tim Nelson's vivacious spirit will live on through his wife, son, friends and players

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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CARROLLTON - Tim Nelson seemed to light up every room or place he visited with his contagious smile and vivacious personality.

Tim, a football coach at three different high schools in the area, a husband and a father, died at age 42 this week after battling colorectal cancer since October 2013. He inspired a large number of people with his five-year cancer battle, raising awareness about the dreaded disease throughout the St. Louis region. Ultimately, Tim brought a lot of attention to cancer fund-raising and became close friends with former St. Louis Cardinals' relief pitcher Jason Motte, a huge cancer research advocate.

Tim was married to Casey (Scott) Nelson and had an infant son, Crew Albert Nelson. Tim was the son of Paul B. Nelson Jr. and the late Carol Forsythe Nelson. Tim's wife, Casey, and son, Crew, meant more to him than anything, his friend J.D. Lorton said.

"Tim loved that baby more than anything in the entire world," Tim's wife, Casey, said. "Tim always called him our miracle. We had two miscarriages before we had Crew. Even when he was his absolute sickest, he would ask, 'did you give Crew his yogurt?' Crew was the absolute light of his life. He would tell him, 'I love you more than anything in the entire world.' He helped me give Crew a bath every single night, even if he had to sit down." Casey said Crew even took on some of Tim's characteristics "When he would moan in pain or if Tim had to cough, Crew was our sunshine baby and a little miracle," Casey said.

Casey and Tim were married for four years and together for nine years total. Casey said Tim probably asked her out 30 times in the beginning and she kept telling him he wasn't her type.

"Finally, I told him this was becoming embarrassing and you have to quit asking me out," Casey said. "I got stuck at a party one night and couldn't find a way home and thought 'who can I call that would come and get me' and I thought of him. I called him and told him if you come and get me I will go on one date with you on a Thursday night. He said OK. A few days later on a Thursday night, we went out to a restaurant.

"The restaurant was completely empty and the waitress sat me by the door in this little bitty corner and the waitress said, 'is this OK?' He said, 'nobody puts baby in a corner.' I laughed so hard. My girlfriend called me and asked if I needed to leave and I told her no, I think this is the man I am going to marry."

One thing Casey said about Tim that many may not know was he was a good dancer even when he weighed close to 300 pounds.

"He would look like Justin Timberlake on the dance floor," she said.

Casey said Tim and her father, Albert, were very close. She said some may not know this, but Tim was a strong man of faith.

“When my dad was at his sickest, they prayed together,” she said. “My family still has the longest running weekly newspaper in the state of Illinois. My father was publisher of the Gazette Patriot for many years. Crew’s middle name is Albert, after my dad.”

J.D. Lorton said when Tim moved into the Calhoun school system in 1990 as a sophomore, he was the missing link in the team’s future success.

“Tim had gone to Bethalto Junior High and then as a sophomore, he came to us,” he said. “He had a great attitude, was a hard worker and was tough as nails. Our practices became harder than our games and I think that is what made us successful. I wouldn’t want to meet in a dark alley with the group I grew up with, they are all very tough.”

Casey said she is positive without Tim’s strong faith, he would never have lasted as long as he did with cancer.

“He was pulling up on five years before he died,” she said. “I had often gone to the hospital and they said, ‘say goodbye to your husband.’ The next day, he would say, ‘do you want to, go to Buffalo Wild Wings.’”

Casey said she believed her husband would have done anything for her.

“He was so giving,” she said. “He never told me no for anything. If I found a purse I liked, I would come home and it would be on our front porch. He would have done anything for me.”

Casey Longnecker, is a coach and teacher at Calhoun High School. Casey said he, Tim, and his old teammates were all very close. He said head football coach Aaron Elmore, J. D. Lorton and him along with all their other teammates still stayed in constant touch off the field. He said he would miss his long-time friend and colleague and that Tim inspired so many people with his courageous fight against cancer.

“It was a long, hard fight for him,” Longnecker said. “I don’t know exactly how to put this all in words, but he will definitely be missed. Even when he didn’t have the strength or energy at practice or games he didn’t make excuses and he showed up every day and the kids built off that.”

J.D. Lorton said Tim looked at his players like his family. J.D. commended Coach Greg Ringhausen for giving Tim a shot at being a member of the Warriors' starting football lineup.

“Nelly (Tim) took every opportunity to not prove Coach Ringhausen, our defensive line coach, wrong,” Lorton said. “Coach Ringhausen and Coach Johns were a huge part of developing Tim.”



Lorton said if he would have developed cancer like Tim, Tim would have done the same thing he did, staying in constant touch with him and supporting him.

“I talked and texted him every day. He was a great guy and best friend,” Lorton said.

In 1992 and 1993, Calhoun won the state football championship and J.D. said without Tim along with the others, it wouldn't have been possible. Several of the members of

Calhoun's successful teams in the 1990s went on to be winning high school coaches. Tim coached not only at Calhoun, but at Marquette Catholic and Dupo. He continued lasting relationships with players from each of those schools.

Family and friends will join together Sunday at James A. Ringhausen Gym at Calhoun High School in Hardin for A Celebration of the Life of Tim Nelson at 1 p.m.

Casey said her husband was loved and inspired a lot of people with his battle against cancer and as a coach.

“Even if he made you mad during games, you still loved him afterward because you knew he was doing what was best for those kids,” she said. “Several former football players would call and ask for advice or come by and visit him. “

When people gather together Sunday in Hardin to remember Tim, they will remember that smile, laugh and heart he had for people. His memory will live on in the many football players and people in general he inspired not only with his fight against cancer, but his love of life, no matter what the odds.

“Tim was an inspiration to people who didn't even know who he was,” Casey said. “Tim never met a stranger. You could take him anywhere and he would make friends with absolutely anybody.”



