

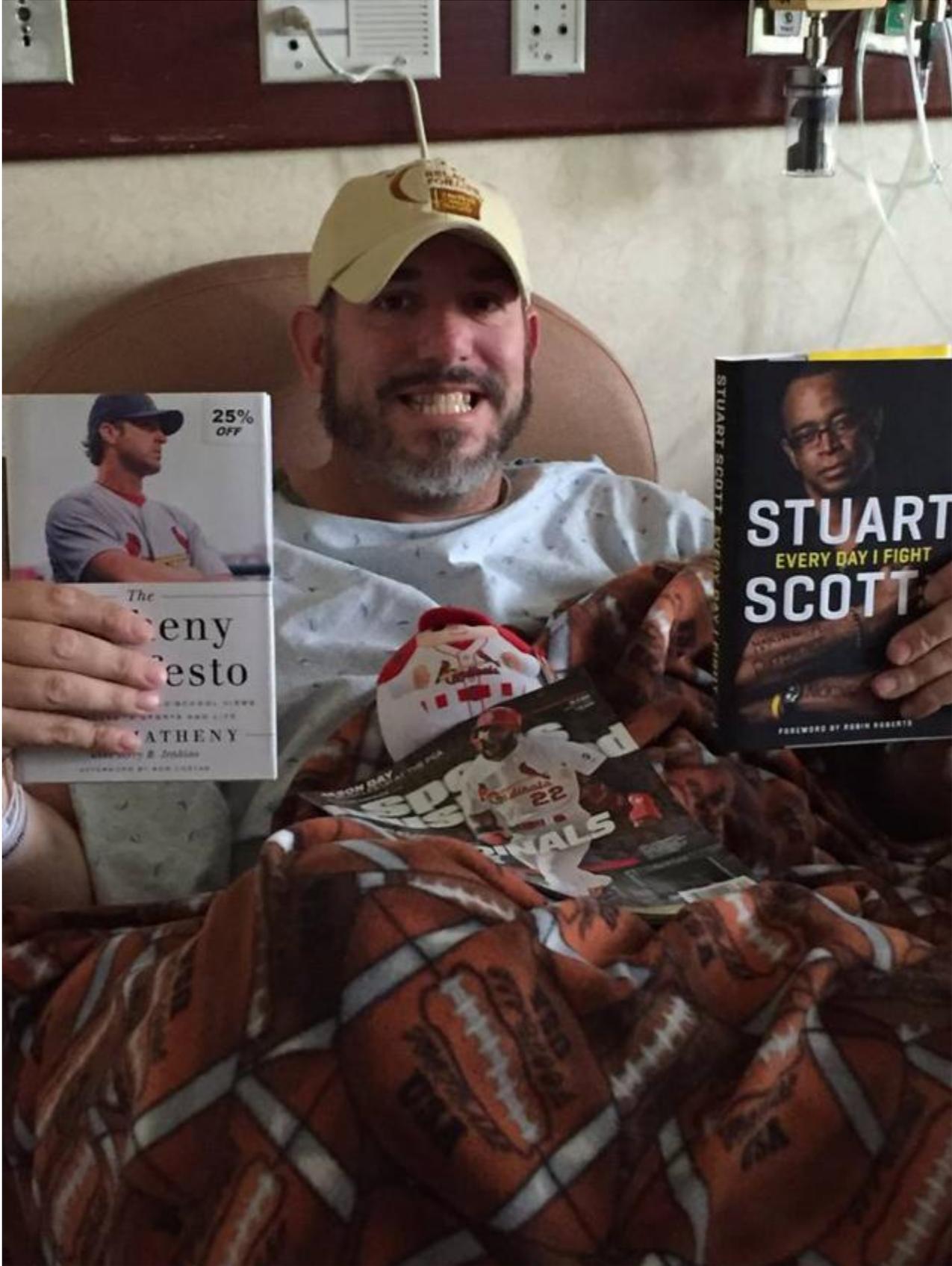
BAND OF BROTHERS: Nelson fights cancer, he and best friends join to bring Calhoun Warriors back to glory

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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HARDIN - Tim Nelson, Aaron Elmore and J.D. Lorton aren't biological brothers, but they are bound by a passion for **Calhoun** football and friendships that have endured for more than two decades.

Nelson is battling cancer and has been undergoing chemotherapy and other daily treatments. He recently had several surgeries in St. Louis. He never lets the cancer sweep a smile off his face for his love of life, his family and his team.



While Nelson was in the hospital recovering from surgeries, members of the Calhoun football team visited and he said it was wonderful the boys did that. He is working to recover and get back to coaching on the field.

“My family and the team mean everything to me and it’s why I’m working so hard to get back healthy and be with the kids and coaches,” Nelson said.

Nelson, Elmore and Lorton have also all been head coaches of high school varsity football teams. The three now coach the Calhoun boys from the junior high team all the way to varsity. The three men were also members of the Warriors’ state championship teams in the early 1990s and are trying to instill that winning spirit back in this group.

Elmore is the head coach of the Warriors. He said Nelson is nothing but tough and is an inspiration to anybody he comes in contact with each day.

“He is going through something that is very hard for himself and everyone around him and we are supporting him through this,” Elmore said. “I constantly think about him. He fights his cancer more than anyone I have ever known.”

J.D. Lorton said he feels fortunate to be coaching with Nelson and Elmore again.

“I know everything about them and what they are trying to do,” Lorton said of Elmore and Nelson. “They are great people and we have great kids. Coach Longnecker was also our quarterback the second year we won state and he coaches with us. The coaching staff is very close-knit group of guys who all played together and know how to win. It is special and does not happen very often. This team is in our blood.”

Lorton looked at Elmore, Nelson and Longnecker and laughed and said his mother, Sandy Lorton, cooked a lot of meals for the present coaching staff of the Calhoun football team when they were together in high school.

The present Calhoun coaches adopted many of the philosophies of Ric Johns and Kirk Brandenburg, not only as coaches but their approach to life in general. The three said other than their parents no one influenced them as much as those two Calhoun coaches in the early 1990s.

The Calhoun boys are learning a lot of life lessons this season as players, watching Nelson struggle with his cancer just like he did last year, but with every bit of his being fight it. The coaches are trying to instill a winning mindset in the kids.

Nelson said he bets there have never been three coaches who share the exact same mindset when it comes to their craft.

“The kids hear the same message from every coach and it is important for all of us to be on the same page,” said Nelson, who specializes in working with the defense. “Coach Elmore is very no nonsense and wants to get things done. He is very dedicated and knows down to the minute what he wants to achieve.

“J.D. is very meticulous of what he wants done and will get on you if he is not seeing what he wants you to see. J.D. is working with the younger kids to try to instill the same philosophy as the rest of us.”

Nelson credits Elmore with talking him into becoming a coach, including the time he served as head coach with Marquette Catholic’s football team.

Lorton has helped Elmore bring back the junior football program to Calhoun and that should pay big dividends in the future. The boys practice with the varsity, working on many of the same drills and philosophies, which Nelson, Lorton and Elmore feel brings a winning tradition.

“The kids practice next to each other,” said Lorton of the junior football kids. “They see how the high school kids are working. At the end of practice, they all run together. When the kids take a water break, they see the high school kids practicing. This is how you build a tradition.”

Elmore said he feels the program is turning the corner this year. Nelson said all summer long the coaches wanted to challenge the kids to play at a high level, participating in various 7-on-7 competitions, including one in Edwardsville.

Lorton said football is a game of pattern and what is different than other sports is it takes so many to pull off posting victories.

“As the kids gain confidence in themselves and their teammates they will get a different attitude of what the expectation should be,” Lorton added.

The Calhoun coaching staff knows more about winning than likely almost any other team they might face both on and off the field. Because of Nelson the Calhoun youth are learning the tenacity to keep fighting, no matter what the odds.

“Coaching and inspiring those kids means everything to me,” Nelson said of the Calhoun squad.