

Football teams show their support

COMMUNITY JOINS IN FAMILY'S BATTLE



Morris County Youth Football League teams held "Gold Out" events last weekend, raising awareness for pediatric cancer. Donations to the league's charity provided \$7,000 to the Ries family last year to help defray son Sean's medical costs. ROBB PANICONI/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD

Parsippany Hills to host 'Gold Out' to promote youth cancer awareness

By Jane Havsy :: @dailyrecordspts

PARSIPPANY — Sean Ries is an energetic, blue-eyed 6-year-old. He loves football, video games and his big brother Brian. He is a lineman for the Little Vikings Travel Flag Blue team in Parsippany.

Sean also has a brain tumor.

He calls the dysembryoplastic neuroepithelial tumor "a bubble," and it gives him "the wobbles," or seizures in the adult world into which he's been forced all too soon. A seizure on Feb. 2, 2012, about two weeks before his fifth birthday, led to the discovery of the slow-growing glioma.

It was about 4.6 centimeters (about 1¾ inches) in diameter, bigger than a golf ball, and impinging on the areas of the brain that control speech and motor functions. Asked to describe his bubble, Sean said, "it's this big," and put his hands up so far apart almost his entire face is visible.

The tumor was originally judged to be inoperable because of its size and location. Sean's parents, Bren-



Six-year-old Sean Ries, who is battling a brain tumor discovered last year, wears No. 58 in honor of New York Giants linebacker Mark Herzlich while leading a team to the coin toss. ROBB PANICONI/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD

"If we lose the football game, it's OK. Losing (the battle against pediatric cancer) is not an option."

DIANE MCCLUSICK
Little Vikings' board secretary

ONLINE

Visit <http://dailyre.co/19x050i> to see a video of the Morris County Youth Football League's "Gold Out" honoring Sean Ries.

See SEAN, Page A2

SEAN

Continued from Page A1

da and Richard Ries, had consultations across the country, but doctors suggested chemotherapy and hope for progress with research, which Brenda heard as “go poison your child for two years, and it may or may not do anything help. ... The best option they had for us is something they haven’t come up with yet.”

Dr. Jeffrey P. Greenfield at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan finally proved to be Sean’s real-life version of Derek “McDreamy” Shepherd from “Grey’s Anatomy.” After extensive tests to map the tumor, Greenfield was able to remove 80 percent of it in a two-stage surgery in May 2012.

“Dr. Greenfield got it out,” Sean said between bites of a salted pretzel and swigs of blue Powerade. “It’s small now. ... He cracked my head to get it out.”

Added Brenda Ries: “He woke up on the operating table, said ‘Mommy’ and reached out to me. I look at his ‘before’ and ‘after’ MRIs, and if I just saw the ‘after’ it would scare the hell out of me. But now I look at it and go, ‘Yay!’ ”

Freedom of football

Watching Sean dash around Jannarone Field on Saturday at the Little Vikings’ Gold Out, a childhood cancer awareness event, Linda Ries blinked back a few tears. Both grandmother and next-door neighbor, she had to keep up a brave face for Brian, who often stayed with her while Sean was in the hospital. She flew home from a vacation in Las Vegas two hours after hearing the diagnosis but had trouble absorbing the severity until Sean had a seizure — “he’d just stop moving, zone out and his body



Sean Ries (right) and his brother Brian, 10, mug for the camera. ROBB PANICONI/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD

would stiffen up and shake” — at her house.

Even with seizures, Sean played T-ball up until he went into the hospital for brain surgery. He still went to preschool in Mount Tabor, as the family tried to keep things as normal as possible. No one was allowed to cry in Sean’s room, always insisting in his presence that he would be OK.

“Maybe it was disbelief. Maybe it was stupidity,” Linda Ries said. “I couldn’t see it going any other way. I couldn’t. He’s my grandson.”

Brian Ries wears No. 58 in honor of New York Giants linebacker Mark Herzlich, who missed his senior season at Boston College because of Ewing’s sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, in his left leg. Sean Ries also has a customized Vikings jersey with that number and has an autographed Her-

zlich jersey on his bedroom wall, but he wore No. 90 to play with his flag team on Saturday.

“Sean wants to be right in the middle of everything,” Brenda Ries said. “We were thrilled when his neurosurgeon said, ‘Let him be a boy and play what he wants to play.’ That’s what we do. We’ll take a deep breath when he falls.”

So many sick kids

About 13,500 children are diagnosed with cancer in the United States every year. One out of five — more than 3,000 — will die by age 8, and three out of five will suffer from long-term or late-onset side effects as a result of their treatment.

Sean works on fine motor skills, speech and memory twice a week at Children’s Specialized Hospital, and has an MRI

every three months to monitor the remaining tumor. Sean’s long-term prognosis is good, but his particular tumor is so rare, there are no statistics.

“I want him to be a kid,” said Little Vikings coach Kelly Simpson, a general contractor with JLT Construction in Parsippany. “I think, in his heart, he wants to be a little kid, too. Everybody’s here in their gold shirts showing support for him. It gives the kids a sense of team, more of a family.”

Almost all the Morris County Youth Football League teams had Gold Out events last weekend, with donations earmarked for the league’s charity, which provided \$7,000 to the Ries family last year to help defray Sean’s medical costs. The MYCFL has given more than \$60,000 to eight families since its founding in 2009.

Parsippany Hills High School will also honor Sean at its Gold Out game against Mendham on Saturday afternoon. The Vikings will wear gold socks and shoelaces, and add a gold ribbon to their helmets. Sean will be an honorary captain, leading the team onto the field and participating in the coin toss.

“If we lose the football game, it’s OK,” said Diane McClusick of Parsippany, the secretary of the Little Vikings board whose 10-year-old son is on the Super Pee-Wee team with Brian Ries.

“Losing this is not an option,” McClusick said. “The parents are fighting for their futures. ... We’re in it together to rally around Sean and make sure he is going to be OK. Both teams want to win the game, but when it comes to the cause, we’re one big family.”

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