



KIND Snack Foods PIAA Sportsmanship Award



SNACK FOODS SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

Cancer. A six-letter word that changes everyone's life. The patient, the family, friends, teammates. In the case of Tommy Laudani, Cross Country and Track rivals.

When I received, the email concerning the KIND Sportsmanship Award, I immediately thought of Josh Long and Tommy Laudani. Josh and Tommy compete at rival schools in south central Pennsylvania; Josh for Fairfield High School and Tommy for Delone Catholic High School. They have competed against each other for three years. And, over those three years, they became friends as well as competitors. Sometime Tommy would win, sometimes Josh. Always, they would congratulate the winner/console the loser.

However, in the fall of 2016, Tommy's times started to get slower and Josh won more contests against him. Still, they continued to support each other-texting and snap-chatting after each meet to see how the other's race had gone. In November of 2016, Tommy received the news that no one wanted to hear; he was diagnosed with Desmoplastic Small Round Cancer Tumors (DSRCT). DSRCT is a very rare and aggressive type of cancer. Tumors start in the abdomen and spread rapidly to the different organs of the patient. Prognosis is poor. Tommy's news was devastating. He faces a tough battle of chemotherapy and radiation.

Immediately upon hearing this diagnosis from the Delone Coaches, Josh initiated a GOFUNDME account in Tommy's name. Josh flooded social media and implored all he reached to donate to Tommy's fund. Josh's initial goal was to raise \$800.00 to help pay for some of the rapidly growing medical bills resulting from Tommy's treatment. Josh's enthusiasm to help Tommy was contagious. Athletes and parents from Delone and Fairfield jumped on the bandwagon to help Josh raise money for Tommy. In less than a month, Josh raised nearly \$6,000.00 for Tommy and his family.

During this timeframe, Josh has also been in constant contact with Tommy through visits or, when Tommy's white blood cell counts are too low for visitors, social media. He has brought other runners to visit Tommy and has encouraged Fairfield athletes to keep in touch with Tommy to help his spirits.

Rarely do you see this type of compassion amongst rival schools/athletes. Josh could have sent a card, asked his mom to bake a meal, or just said, "That stinks." and gone on with his life. Instead, he sided with Tommy to help him in his fight against cancer. As a result, the burden of Tommy's medical bills are less and he and his family just went on a trip to the Atlanta Aquarium—a dream come true for Tommy and a trip made possible by Josh's GOFUNDME campaign.

As Josh's coach, I am extremely proud of Josh's actions. In a time of need, he did not hesitate to act. His actions truly exemplify the highest ideals of interscholastic competition. As coaches and athletes, we hear those words before every meet/race. Josh took those words to heart when he selflessly set out to help a runner from a rival school. His empathy and concern for Tommy negated any sense of enmity that rivals often feel. Josh continues to show true sportsmanship and is deserving of the Kind Snack Foods Sportsmanship Award.

(Josh's coach is Fairfield cross-country coach Marcia Roan)