

Headline: Thomas Archibald and Wentworth lacrosse form an unbreakable bond

By Michael J. Lewis

The whole team stood out in the cold parking lot. And it was beautiful.

Let me take you back to a cold, New England Friday night in the fall of 2013, the kind of evening where just about anyone would like to stay home, curl up under the covers, and watch TV.

Or if you're a college kid, the kind of night where you'd like to be out partying, or studying, or doing any one of 1,000 things.

But on this night, there was no place else the Wentworth Institute of Technology men's lacrosse team would rather have been. They were there to support their brother, Thomas Archibald, then 9, who was about to go inside to Boston Children's Hospital to have a non-sedated MRI.

Thomas suffers from nonketotic hyperglycemia, or NKH, a rare metabolic disorder that prevents the body from processing glycine as their bodies produce it. This can cause seizures or possible brain damage. Thomas also has a significant immune deficiency, meaning he can get seriously ill from just the slightest cold or flu.

This MRI was a big deal, and his parents, Bill and Kristin, and older siblings Ryan and Paul, knew it. Kristin had mentioned to head coach Dan Russo that the MRI was coming up, but to see what she saw when the Archibald's pulled into the lot ...

"You cannot even imagine what that was like, what that did for Thomas emotionally, to drive in and see that sight," Kristin says, wiping away tears. Thomas is crying a little at the memory, too, as his mother continues.

"They stayed there while we went inside; only a few of them were allowed to come in with us. Two or three hours later, they were still there, when we came out. When you have that kind of support from these young men ... it shows you the impact this relationship has had on their lives. And such a huge impact on our lives, too."

The bond between Thomas and the Wentworth team is as strong as any in the whole FOJ universe; since Oct. 2012, when a shy, nervous little boy walked into a locker room containing 39 players and a few more coaches and trainers. Thomas

and the Leopards' players soon made small talk and he felt at ease. Except for one thing...

"I thought there was no way I'd be able to remember all of their names," he says with a smile. (Thomas smiles a lot when talking about Wentworth.)

Kristin says she saw a small gesture by the players that first day that made her sure this would be a great experience.

"Right away I knew things would be different as soon as they started coming over to talk to Thomas, and they bent down to look him right in the eyes when they engaged with him," Kristin says. "That really struck me as pretty profound, like they were trying to make a human connection immediately, and treat him as one of their own. I was overwhelmed with their kindness."

Tim Parlato, now a senior who's one of Thomas' closest friends on the team, remembers that day too.

"He broke the ice with a few guys and we soon discovered he was a really smart, funny kid," Tim says. "As we got to know him, I've learned he's a really strong, good kid, who surprises you with what he says. Every time you think you know Thomas, he says something that really shocks you."

Over the past 3-plus years, Thomas has been woven into the fabric of Wentworth lacrosse as much as the team's uniforms. When his health permits, he helps out with pre-game warmups, sits on the bench during games ("they really don't curse when he's around," Kristin says) and hams it up in the locker room.

Off the field, players like Parlato and Tyler Forthofer, Pat Helfriph and Chris Kipp have taken Thomas to Friendly's, attended NKH fundraisers, and watched him take karate lessons.

Thomas' most important team function, though, is judging the Leopards' annual "Ugly Christmas Sweater" contest.

"I wouldn't be caught dead in any of those sweaters," Thomas says with a big laugh. "Thankfully I'm a judge, not a participant."

Russo says his program has been “completely changed” by the relationship with Thomas, and says his players take their responsibility as role models very seriously.

The team’s most important role in Thomas’ life, though, may just be their daily encouragement and support.

He lives with his illness every day, so every day he could use a little extra love.

“I get texts from at least one of the players just about every day,” Thomas says. “Words can’t describe how much their words mean to me. Some days (with NKH) you get up and you have terrible headaches, or you feel like you can barely move.

“But on days I know I’m going to see a game or a practice, I forget anything’s wrong with me.”

