

Headline: Nicholas Trivelpiece a special piece of Syracuse men's hoops Final Four run

By Michael J. Lewis

If you looked closely at all the television closeups of Syracuse University men's basketball coach Jim Boeheim over the past few weeks at the NCAA men's basketball tournament, you've likely seen it.

On the legendary coach's right wrist is a small orange and blue bracelet, with the words "Never Give Up" written on them.

Boeheim, the team's assistant coaches, and other team personnel have been wearing them all year, since they were gifted to the team by maybe the team's most important and cherished non-player: 12-year-old Nicholas Trivelpiece, whose been with the program almost as long as 40-year-coach Boeheim.

OK, not really. Nick has "only" been with the Orange for seven years, but he's become a much loved and appreciated piece of Syracuse's success.

"The last time we made bracelets for the team, they went to the Final Four," Nick's mom, Karen, said. "We made them again this year, but we never thought ..."

Karen and Nick aren't the only ones; just about everyone in Syracuse, and across America, is stunned that the Orange made an incredible run through March Madness. Syracuse, who many didn't even think deserved to make the Tournament, won four games as a No. 10 seed and reached Saturday's Final Four, where they finally lost to North Carolina, 83-66.

And watching the success of top players like Michael Gbinije and Trevor Cooney has been Nicholas, who hangs out with his buddies at practice and games.

"It's been so exciting; every game I get so nervous watching," Nick said in an interview last Friday from his home in Syracuse. "I almost had a heart attack the last two games!"

The relationship between Nick and the Syracuse team is one of the Friends of Jaclyn Foundation's longest; it began in 2009, when Nicholas was just 5. He had

been diagnosed at age 2 with an optic glioma, which is a slow-growing tumor that can occur anywhere along the optic pathway.

Surgery helped remove part of the tumor, and Nicholas has had repeated bouts of chemotherapy.

But happily, his scans have come back cancer-free for the past three years, allowing him to enjoy all the great Syracuse basketball action.

Since his adoption, Nick has gotten to do some amazing things with the Orange; he's gotten to play in an alumni game with school legends like Pearl Washington and Preston Shumpert; he's been interviewed by current star Trevor Cooney, and been featured multiple times in *The Post-Standard*, the newspaper that covers the team.

"They've really made us a part of the program, and have been wonderful," Karen Trivelpiece said.

Nick said his normal routine with the team is to show up at practice and joke around with the players; he really liked assistant coach Gerry McNamara and assistant (and Boenheim's anointed successor) Mike Hopkins.

"Coach Hopkins is really nice, he's kind of quirky and always doing weird stuff with me," Nicholas said.

On gamedays Nick and Karen arrive at the Carrier Dome about 90 minutes before tip-off; that's when Nicholas hangs out in the locker room with the players, and helps them with their pregame warmup.

He's grown particularly close to Cooney, a fifth-year senior this year.

"We've made him a special gift this year, a keychain that says 'It's been an honor playing with you,'" Karen says. "Trevor's been with us for so long and has been so great with Nicholas."

Nick is such a sweet kid he even defends Coach Boenheim, who is universally regarded as a gruff, humorless head coach.

But Nicholas said he's a good guy who's done a great job and hey, when he yells and screams at the referees, "he's just pointing out their really, really bad calls, which he's supposed to do," Nicholas says with a big smile.

Coach Boeheim has softened a bit when talking about the team's best buddy.

"He's a great kid, and he's great to have around," Boeheim said of Nicholas in a past interview. "He's inspirational to me, and I think the guys really like having him around."

With the Orange making the Final Four, Nicholas has gotten to enjoy more

It's so cool to see them do so well; they're all so nice to me. Every single guy on this year's team has been awesome. I just hope they can win two more games."



