

Headline: Jakub West finds a home, and gets “bowled over” with Marquette lacrosse

By Michael J. Lewis

Sometimes a first impression can set the tone for an entire relationship, both in good and bad ways.

When then 6-year-old Jakub West of Round Lake, Ill. met the Marquette men’s lacrosse team back in 2011, he had no idea what to expect.

Jakub had already been through more trauma than any kid should ever go through: As a 3-year-old he was diagnosed with an astrocytoma brain tumor, and has endured a total of four surgeries. One of those surgeries saw Jakub suffer a small cut near his optic nerve, resulting in his left eye being almost completely closed since, and doctors at Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago discovered a second tumor that was inoperable.

So needless to say, Jakub could’ve used some buddies, and some laughs, when he and his family connected with Friends of Jaclyn and Marquette.

So at his adoption ceremony at Marquette, Jakub’s new buddies pulled out an oldie-but-goodie routine to make him smile.

“The team pretended they were human bowling pins in the gym, and one guy threw a ball and then all 10 of them fell over like they were pins,” Jakub remembers. “It was pretty funny.”

Jakub’s mom, Jessica, and father, David, knew then that her son might have found a great team to hang out with. Over the past five years, as Jakub’s health has stabilized (thankfully his last chemo treatment was in 2012), he’s become an integral part of the Warriors’ squad.

He’s grown up with the team that just started playing Division I lacrosse four years ago, and watched an entire cycle of players come in as freshmen and now prepare to graduate.

The Warriors have experienced almost-immediate success with Jakub by their side, reaching the NCAA Tournament this spring for the first time (they lost a heartbreaking one-goal game to eventual national champion North Carolina in the first round).

“He’s a little bummed because this year so many of the guys he started with are graduating,” Jessica says. “When this started, I just hoped Jakub would have somebody to look up to and have fun with, and enjoy himself a little. But all of this has been so much more, and so much better.”

Jakub, who says his favorite players are Jacob Richard, B.J. Grill and Conor Gately, has gotten to sit on the bench for games, been in the locker room before and after matches, and had lots of off-the-field adventures with the team.

“We got to go to Six Flags, and bowling, and took a bike trip,” Jessica remembers. “The players and coaches, and head coach (Joe) Amplo have totally welcomed Jakub.”

Jessica says she was touched that the Marquette coaches once made the three-hour drive to Chicago from Marquette’s campus in Milwaukee to hold a “no more chemo” party at the hospital, bringing cupcakes with them to celebrate.

For Jakub, sweets are a big part of bonding with the team.

“I really like being able to hang out with the guys at the tailgate party, and eat my favorite mint chocolate chip ice cream,” he says.

Jakub, who has two younger sisters, Makayla (3) and Ayden (8), said becoming a part of the lacrosse team has been “awesome” and can’t wait to see how far the team goes next year.

“Next year, they’re going all the way!”





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