

Headline: Lipscomb baseball welcomes a “celebrity” in Brooks Russell

By Michael J. Lewis

If you’re a spectator watching a Lipscomb University baseball game in the spring at the school’s campus in Nashville, Tenn., you may have seen an unusual sight.

Oh sure, there are hits, runs, errors, and strikeouts, just like everywhere else baseball is played.

But what you might have seen at Lipscomb the past few springs is a little boy sliding all the way down the berm hill next to the field, laughing and having a grand old time.

“Yeah, Brooks liked that right away, I think,” Lipscomb head coach Jeff Forehand said. “He’s always happy when he’s around the team, but I think he likes the hill as much as anything.”

Lipscomb’s baseball team, always a strong squad, has been improved by more than just Brooks’ hill-sliding ability. The now-8-year-old has been a beacon of light for the team since his adoption on Feb. 13, 2014. He plays catch with the team before the game, lightens the mood after it, and this year even got to go to Bison baseball camp over the summer, working out with all the other kids and players.

“He loves baseball and he loves this team,” says Kari Russell, Brooks’ mom. “He loves telling people that this is “his team,” and he has a great time there.”

Brooks’ medical journey began when he was 4 years old, after more than a year of blood tests and MRI’s found nothing wrong with him. Finally in May, 2012, doctors at Vanderbilt University found a brain tumor on his spinal cord. Subsequent surgery removed most of the tumor, but it also left Brooks paralyzed for six weeks.

Brooks started chemo shortly after surgery and after a year, the tumor had stopped spreading.

“He was having some neuropathy (tingling and non-feeling in hands and feet) and trouble with fine motor skills, but things were going better,” Kari says. “But then

in August (2015) the MRI showed some progression, so we just finished another year of chemo this July.”

Through all of that, Brooks, who lives in Hendersonville, Tenn., about 20 minutes from Nashville, found the Lipscomb team. Brian Ryman, the director of baseball operations, heard about Friends of Jaclyn and wanted to get the Bison involved. The Russells were connected to FOJ through the family of Alex Scogins, who was adopted by Vanderbilt football, also in Nashville.

Brooks’ adoption was more than just a signing, it was a media event.

“We had TV stations and local media here, and they did a nice job making Brooks feel special,” Forehand said.

“The whole thing blew up; we didn’t know what we were walking into,” laughs Kari. “All of a sudden we saw ESPN cameras and reporters and Brooks just started cutting up, making everyone laugh, being a boy.”

Since then, Brooks has become more and more a part of the Lipscomb program. Adam Lee, who graduated in the spring and was a Bison player, said Brooks “is one of us.”

“He’s awesome and totally just one of the guys,” Lee said. “We try to focus on him when he’s here, and really make him feel a part of us. He’ll be a Bison for life, and when new guys come into the program, they learn his story from us real quick.”

“The coaches are great and always make me feel welcome,” Brooks said. “I like being in the dugout, and getting to throw out the first pitch once (in 2014) was pretty awesome.”

Brooks’ health is obviously something the Lipscomb players are cognizant of, and Ryman said the team uses his story for inspiration.

“He’s great for morale and really keeps the guys focused on how much we are blessed with,” Ryman said. “And the Russells are such great people, that we’re all happy anytime we can help them.”

