

Headline: For Elgin Community College, three is definitely not a crowd

By Michael J. Lewis

Six brain surgeries, and five rounds of chemotherapy before his first birthday.

And still, the smile never leaves Matthew Erickson's face.

On good days, on bad days, on days when everyone else around him might be feeling worried, Matthew Erickson just keeps smiling.

A kid who has endured so much in his first 3 ½ years of life, beginning with his first surgery four days after birth when his Grade 4 neuro glioma was discovered, in December, 2011, is the happiest person Jerry McLaughlin knows.

McLaughlin is the head coach of the Elgin Community College women's basketball team, and along with former ECC coach Scott Cork and current men's coach Reed Nusbich, he linked up with Friends of Jaclyn and adopted Matthew in January, 2013.

But Elgin didn't just adopt Matthew; they took on the whole Erickson brood. Older brother Nolan, 8, was adopted by the baseball team, while Sophia, 5, was taken in by the women's hoops squad.

Matthew, now 3 ½ and chemotherapy-free since August, 2012, is the proud adoptee of the men's basketball team.

"He's just an incredible, special kid, unlike any I've ever met," McLaughlin said in a recent interview. "He wakes up smiling, and he goes to bed smiling. And after our athletes spend some time with him, they're all smiling, too."

Elgin Community College first got involved with FOJ after seeing the first HBO "Real Sports" piece, and early in 2013 were told there was a local family that could really use some support.

"The men's basketball team adopted Matthew first, and then we figured that Sophia could probably use some support and attention too, so I talked to my team and all of them were excited to adopt her," McLaughlin said. "And then the baseball team decided they wanted to adopt Nolan, too."

And, not to say there's a *direct* correlation, but McLaughlin's squad made the national tournament the first year Sophia was with them. So if nothing else, she's certainly a good luck charm.

The Erickson kids come to as many games and practices as they can; Sophia often goes for ice cream with her teammates, while Matthew lights up the locker room every time he visits the men's team.

The family, led by parents Ben and Sue Erickson, and the Elgin teams are constantly raising awareness of pediatric brain tumors, through fundraisers for Children's Miracle Network and Lurie Hospital in Illinois (where Matthew gets treatment) and a "superhero book" they published called "Super Matthew," available on Amazon.com.

"When anything good happens, we're there for the Erickson family," McLaughlin said. "And when anything bad happens, we're there for them, too."

McLaughlin notes that since Elgin is a 2-year school, three different groups of athletes have gotten to know the Erickson kids, and that the benefits are so great for the Elgin players.

"It's a blessing for our kids to see a family like Matthew's, it really is," McLaughlin said. "Whatever problems they're having, they hang out with Matthew and his siblings, and all their problems seem so much smaller.

"You can't hang out with the Erickson kids," McLaughlin added, "and not come away feeling better."