



Headline: A trio of Maynard children find love at Wake Forest

By Michael J. Lewis

It is a motivational tactic as old as the dirt football players kick up while they're running for a touchdown or a tackle.

You read something in the newspaper, or hear something on TV, or glimpse it on the Internet: Your next opponent makes a derogatory comment about you, or says something arrogant or cocky about themselves, and suddenly you get even more fired up.

Coaches use this tactic all the time, along with the equally-ancient "Nobody believes in us!" trope.

What's more rare, though, is a 10-year-old autistic boy who also has leukemia using fiery words from the other team to pump you up.

But there Aidan Maynard was last November, hanging out at Wake Forest football practice on Wednesday like always. Only, this was Notre Dame week, when Wake Forest would face an outstanding Irish team.

And it seems Aidan, adopted by the Demon Deacons just a few months earlier, had seen a quote from a Fighting Irish player saying something about how they were going to easily win all the rest of their games.

So as became custom, Aidan gave the "break down" speech to his Wake Forest buddies at the end of each practice. Normally, he writes his little talk himself; but this time, dad Joey helped him.

"He walks into the huddle," Joey says, "and he had a piece of paper in his hand that had what had been said (by Notre Dame). And he reads what it said, and then he rips the paper in half, and yelled "Now go shock the world!"

"I'd never seen those players so fired up," Joey says. "And Aidan was pretty fired up too!"

Does it weaken the story to point out that Notre Dame beat Wake Forest 28-7 a few days later? Nah. Totally besides the point.

The bigger picture is that in just a few months, the Wake Forest sports programs have become a second family to the Maynards. Besides Aidan's adoption by the football team, his twin 7-year-old siblings, Abby and Sean, were also adopted last fall by the women's basketball team.

Together, the three Maynards have been to as many Demon Deacon practices and games as even the most ardent superfans. And in Aidan's case especially, having 80 or so new best buddies has made a huge difference.

"He's a lot less shy around new people now, that's for sure," says Erin Maynard, mom to Aidan, Abby and Sean. "He's no longer afraid to express his likes to somebody, and he engages in conversation more. And his grades in school have gotten better; he's now a solid B student."

Aidan's relationship with Wake Forest began a little inauspiciously; on the day he was to be adopted last summer, the flu bug was running through the football locker room "and like 30 players were sick. So we didn't want to expose Aidan to that," said Joey, who says Aidan's initial diagnosis of acute lymphoblastic leukemia (A.L.L.) came in 2011.

Instead of the typical adoption, Aidan met the team at the annual Fan Fest in August, where he was surprised to see the players already knew all about him.

Aidan soon grew close to players like Brandon Chubb, K.J. Brant and Matt Colburn, and the Maynards were stunned to learn that head coach Dave Clawson's son Eric has the exact same type of autism, called PDD-NOS, that Aidan has.

Erin and Joey both say that Abby and Sean having a team of their own has been big for their self-esteem; the Maynards sometimes bring cookies to the players, and often go onto the court after games to celebrate when the Deacons win. Abby and Sean were adopted right before the women's basketball season began last October.

And what does Sean remember about meeting the women's basketball team?

"How tall they were," he says, "and that they couldn't stop hugging me."

The Maynards have become enormous supporters of FOJ and said they've even gotten one of Aidan's school classmates a team as well, the Wake Forest men's basketball team.

"It was meant to me, this relationship," Joey says. "They've been so warm, and welcoming, and have become such a great part of our family. We're extremely lucky to have Wake Forest."

