

Headline: Notre Dame baseball's biggest fan/jokester is Daniel Alexander

By Michael J. Lewis

Like most people who fall in love, Notre Dame baseball player Kyle Richardson was eager to have his girlfriend meet his best pals.

So last August Kyle was hanging out with his young buddy Daniel Alexander in Daniel's hometown of Chesterton, Ind. to help celebrate Daniel's 14th birthday.

As soon as Kyle introduced his significant other to Daniel, he uttered something that to this day makes Richardson laugh.

"He looks right at her and says 'run away while you can,'" Kyle says, chuckling.

Happily for Kyle, his girlfriend didn't immediately heed Daniel's advice, but the joke was typical of the kind of relationship Daniel has developed with the Fighting Irish baseball team since his 2013 adoption.

Battling through an inoperable brain tumor discovered in August, 2010, enduring multiple surgeries and chemotherapy treatments, and after finishing that developing a blood clot in his heart, Daniel has been an inspiration to the Fighting Irish program.

Sitting on the bench during games, he's "just like one of the players, cracking jokes and making fun of everybody," said the Irish's Ryan Lidge. "He acts like all of us do, and he's just an awesome kid."

Upon his adoption in the fall of 2013, Notre Dame coach Mik Aoki stressed to his players the health difficulties Daniel had already been through and urged them to make him feel at home when he came to South Bend.

And by just about every measure, they have. Players like Richardson, Lidge and Scott Tully have embraced the entire Alexander family, including parents Dennis and Karen, and Daniel's brother James. They go to Daniel's baseball games, attend his band performances, and even get him into a little bit of PG-13 rated trouble.

Umm, guys, what's this about you all being kicked out of Strikes and Spares go-karting facility one night while hanging out with Daniel?

"Yeah, that happened," Scott admits sheepishly. "We were a bunch of college guys and a middle school kid hanging out last year, and we all went go-karting, and we thought we'd let Daniel win, and then he comes out and totally smokes us. So we all got a little competitive and were maybe bumping the karts a little too much, and, yeah, they asked us to leave."

"But just so it's clear," Kyle adds with a laugh, "we've been back there since and haven't had any problems!"

For the Fighting Irish players, how close they've gotten to Daniel has been a surprise.

“I just thought this would be a cool little experience hanging out with a kid who’s been through a lot,” Ryan says. “But it’s been so much more. His mom Karen is awesome, always supporting us and letting us know how special we are. But that kid ... we’re the lucky ones, getting to know him.”

Aoki says his team holds a weekly “Perspective Poster” event where the team talks about the truly important things in life, things that are much more crucial than a base hit or throwing error.

“We talked a lot about Daniel in the beginning, about how much joy he seems to get being around the team and that we shouldn’t take for granted how lucky we all are, to get to play baseball,” Aoki said.

As Daniel’s health has improved, he hasn’t been out to quite as many games this season as in past years, with his own baseball games, band activities and other typical teenage boy pursuits taking up his time.

Still, Kyle frequently calls him from the bus on road trips and passes the phone around to the team, and whenever Kyle has a hospital visit or checkup, team members try to be there.

“We tell him we’re praying for him and we’ll always be there for him, and I know he’ll be in my life forever,” Kyle says. “He’s just a wonderful kid, you know? So lucky that we know him.”



