

Headline: How one tennis player inspired an entire university to adopt Wesley Berry

By Michael J. Lewis

Tyler Carey doesn't want all the credit. Heck, he doesn't want any at all.

But despite his protestations and deferrals, one thing is quite obvious about the 22-year-old recent graduate of Mary Washington University: He's a pioneer.

And one with an enormous heart full of love and caring.

Carey was a standout tennis player at the Virginia school for four years, but that's not all he'll be remembered for.

Instead, his kindness, initiative and tenaciousness off the court is what will make him talked about for years and years to come.

He'll be remembered on campus, and in the house of one Wesley Berry, a 20-year-old man who's been fighting brain tumors for eight years.

It always takes at least one special athlete, coach, or administrator to get their school involved in Friends of Jaelyn, and help immeasurably improve the life of a pediatric brain tumor sufferer.

Usually, the participation consists of one kid and one team from a school. However, Tyler Carey went way above and beyond what others have done before.

After initially hearing about FOJ from his father a few years ago, Carey reached out to FOJ and asked that his Mary Washington tennis team be considered for adopting a local child.

"If you ever have a chance to help a kid who's battling brain cancer, you have to do it, that's what I think," Carey said. "So I told my tennis coach about FOJ, and he thought it was a great idea.

"Then once we got contacted about Wesley being a match for us," Carey continued, "I thought 'why not get the whole school involved?'"

From that brainstorm, an entire campus got involved. Every Mary Washington team has done something for Wesley; since adopting him one year ago, the Eagles' athletic department has fully embraced Wesley as one of their own. At his official adoption last August, all 500 of Mary Washington's student-athletes welcomed him to the Eagles' nest, and Wesley, a huge Redskins fan, got to meet team legend Darrell Green, an administrator at the school.

Green then gave Wesley a Redskins jersey.

"He was smiling real big about that," Carey recalled with a laugh. "He couldn't believe it."

He's thrown out the first pitch at a baseball game ("that's his favorite sport," Carey said), and shot off the starting gun at a track meet.

Along the way, Carey has shepherded Wesley and introduced him to each team, as “Win for Wesley” games have been instituted.

Carey’s leadership has come as no surprise to Mary Washington Director of Athletics Ken Tyler.

“I am just so proud of that young man,” Tyler said. “What he has done speaks volumes about the kind of kid he is, and the kind of family he’s from. We’re a Division III school, and we embrace the philosophy of helping out anywhere we can. Tyler has gone above and beyond.

“Whatever direction in life Tyler chooses to go,” Tyler said, “I know he’s going to make an impact.”

Maybe the best moment for Wesley came on Feb. 14, when he attended a Mary Washington men’s basketball game against Penn State-Harrisburg. To his surprise, Wesley was ushered onto the court at halftime along with his parents, and the whole crowd (and both teams) sang “Happy Birthday” to him.

At the game Mary Washington also collected donations for Friends of Jaclyn, and Wesley was high-fived and treated like the star of the game. And when Wesley fell ill, Carey went to his home for a cheer-up visit.

“He’s a really funny guy, and he’s definitely a fighter, you can tell that just by talking to him and what he’s been through,” Carey said. “One little thing I remember: He always wanted to take the stairs in buildings, not the elevator. He’s a real strong guy.”

For all his efforts with Wesley Berry and other charitable work, Carey was given the Division III Arthur Ashe Sportsmanship and Leadership Award.

With Carey now graduating, he’s passing on the “Wesley reins” to women’s tennis player Shelby Harris.

But he doesn’t plan to forget Wesley, or Mary Washington, anytime soon.

“You get to know a kid like that, who’s practically the same age as I am, and it’s just so eye-opening,” Carey said. “You think about what he’s gone through, and you see how appreciative he and his family are ... I’m just glad we got to be friends with a great kid like Wesley.”