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Former Palatine sports standout fighting colon cancer



Palatine's Chris Macahon (5) celebrates with his teammates after a victory over Deerfield in the spring of 2014. A multisport athlete in high school, Macahon remains intent on playing Division I baseball despite his recent cancer diagnosis.

Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer

By Dick Quagliano
Daily Herald Correspondent

It was just a twinge in his back.

Like most athletes, Chris Macahon had felt those little pains. But this ended much differently than anyone expected.

Macahon was playing shortstop for Mesa Community College in Arizona this past fall. The college freshman had gone deep into the hole for a ground ball and reached his glove across his body. He felt the pain right away, but finished the play.

"I have had injuries before," said Macahon, who was a two-sport athlete at Palatine from 2012 to 2015 and was voted the school's male athlete of the year. "I didn't think much about it. I told my parents about it and I was taking Advil. But it just wouldn't go away."

And it didn't go away until Macahon, who is 19 years old, and his family got the unexpected news that the college freshman had colon cancer. And to make matters worse, he was in stage 3 of the disease.

Macahon had come home at Thanksgiving and told his parents that he had injured his back and that the injury was not

going away. He had a MRI and it didn't show an issue, so he returned to school for finals.

Macahon came home at Christmas and still had pain. Doctors thought he could have colitis, Crohn's disease or diverticulitis. More tests were schedule after the holiday.

But Chris had bigger problems headed his way.

Three days after the holiday, things began to change rapidly.

"I got real sick on the 28th," Macahon said. "I had two straight nights with no sleep and a fever and the chills. I got X-rays, but it's didn't show anything."

Macahon went to the hospital, where it was determined that he would need surgery to remove part of his, colon, which had an abscess. Chris then went to the University of Chicago, where they performed surgery after 15 days in the hospital.

During the surgery, doctors made a startling discovery. Chris had developed colon cancer and it had penetrated the colon wall. Doctors removed a foot of his colon along with 30 lymph nodes and found cancer in 11 of them.

"I couldn't imagine this to begin with," said Jamie Macahon, Chris' father. "There was never any mention of this before he went into surgery, and when they come out and tell you it is a tumor, it is numbing."

Palatine basketball coach Eric Millstone, who saw Macahon over the Christmas break and knew he was ill, was shocked at the diagnosis.

"This is something that no 19-year-old kid should have to deal with," Millstone said. "That shouldn't happen to anyone, but especially to a kid like Chris."

But Macahon would then find out how many lives he had touched during his career at Palatine and at Mesa. And he also learned about the strength and character of the people of the Northwest suburbs.

His roommate's mom began a Go Fund Me page (www.gofundme.com/caw7s7hg (<http://www.gofundme.com/caw7s7hg>)) and it went viral throughout the Northwest Suburbs and beyond. In 11 days, 301 individuals and groups have donated \$24,703.

Prospect basketball coach John Camardella heard the news from his former player, Matt McPartlin, who is at Indiana University. McPartlin texted his former coach about Macahon, asking Camardella if the Knights could swing into action. Camardella told this year's Prospect team about Macahon, and they raised more than \$500 to donate to their former opponent.

"We all sort of felt this pit in our stomach when we found out about it," Camardella said. "He is an outstanding representative of our community and our league. I brought it up to our guys and they reacted in less than 20 hours."

Baseball teams from Palatine to St. Viator are putting together fundraisers for Macahon. There is also a fundraiser on April 28 at the DuPage Training Academy.

Macahon, who lost nearly 20 pounds, has regained most of his weight. He has had two chemo treatments so far and has the third of his 12 treatments set for next Tuesday.

Macahon said he is feeling good so far. He is also overwhelmed by the support from Palatine, and the suburban community.

"It is just amazing to see all these people that have done this for me," Macahon said. "It is very humbling. To see all this support, it just motivates me even more to get healthy again."

Macahon also is looking the big picture. He plans to return to Mesa and still has his goal of playing Division 1 baseball.

"I have started to work out again," Macahon said. "I want to get back again as soon as I can. I know I can beat this and I will do just that."

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