

UNL student known for devotion to club hockey team dies after battle with leukemia

By Lexie Heinle / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, January 28, 2015 5:00 pm

Zachary Miller made a lasting impact on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln club hockey team.

“He was an all-around team player,” Coach Larry Taylor said. “Everything he did was for the team. They loved him.”

Miller, 24, died Sunday from acute lymphocytic leukemia at the Nebraska Medical Center. The junior from Omaha was a child, youth and family studies student at UNL.

Diagnosed in April 2011, Miller’s cancer was in remission by August of that year. Another round with cancer began in April 2014. A Sept. 25 stem cell transplant helped, but on Dec. 19, the leukemia cells were found again.

Miller became the hockey team president three years ago and took over the logistics of scheduling buses, hotels and managing the budget.

“He handled his illness with such positivity that he made players feel comfortable about it,” Taylor said. Miller had a great sense of humor and stayed optimistic during his battle with leukemia, he said. During practice in 2011, Miller even joked with a freshmen player, saying “Don’t hit me. I have cancer.”

Although Taylor described Miller as an average hockey player, his dedication and commitment were exceptional.

“When he was on the ice, he worked his butt off,” Taylor said.

The Huskers held a fundraiser for Miller last Friday, winning 3-0 against Dordt and then auctioning their orange game jerseys. The event raised almost \$5,000. The team has decided to retire Miller’s No. 19 jersey at the September 2015 opening of the Breslow Ice Center, Taylor said. However, if Miller’s brother decides to play, he will be able to wear his brother’s number.

Sophomore Ross Johnson, the club’s vice president, said he saw Miller’s generosity on one of his first encounters with him. On Johnson’s move-in day, Miller came by to drop off hockey equipment, and then took the time to help his new team member move in.

“Zach’s like my brother,” Johnson said. Miller was also Johnson’s first call after his parents told him



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that his brother, Evan, also has cancer. Miller skipped class to be there for his friend and teammate.

“Whenever I was down, he would recognize it and bring me back up,” Johnson said.

Survivors include parents, Tim and Wanda, and brother Jacob of Bellevue; grandfather Richard Larson of San Antonio; and fiancée Amanda Robine of Omaha.

The team will travel to Miller’s funeral service, which is at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Bellevue Christian Center, 1400 Harvell Drive.