

Coach Pearl, Coach Prewett, and the entire Auburn Basketball Family

I just wanted to first say what a great game against Alabama this past weekend. Our family had a great time in Auburn watching the beat down on Bama. Lisa and Sam had a great time on Friday. I don't think you know exactly how much it means to some people when you bring them into your world for a just few moments.

First you have my wife, Lisa, who is now calling players by their names and asking when the next game is. She was amazed at the film study and how you guys practiced. Newest hard core basketball fan.

Now you have Sam. He has had it pretty rough since diagnosis but we are in much better place almost two years into this journey. He is an amazing kid and never asked "why me" or complained. Coach, you asked Sam what were the "hardest" and "best" things since had was diagnosed. He answered pretty well but I wanted to expand.

I would say that the hardest thing he has had to endure is being removed from friends, school, and sports for over two years. This is not the normal experience for teenager. Cancer is a thief and has taken things away from him that we all take for granted. Sam was super active and involved in both basketball and baseball. He has not been able to participate in sports as he is needing to get stronger and his body to recover from side effects of the heavy chemo meds. He is working hard every day to be ready when he gets the chance to be an athlete and full time student again. Not being able to be a "normal" teenager has not been easy and probably the hardest thing to overcome.

This brings us to his "Best". He said that meeting "Coach Pearl" and the "Team" has been his BEST. I believe he spoke the truth. Some of his best and biggest smiles have been related to visiting one-on-one with the team. His face lights up any time he gets a text from Coach Pearl. These contacts with you and the team have allowed him to feel extra special. The experiences are better than any gift we can purchase him. Thanks again to you and the players for making him feel this way and calling him part of your "family" and less like a kid fighting cancer.

Please let the players know how much he appreciates them. He was on cloud nine twice this weekend. The first was when Bryce Brown went out of his way to say "Hello" to Sam and Lisa at Hamilton's Friday night. He now has a picture with himself and Bryce (without his signature headband). The second was when Bryce and Malik stopped to say hello on their way out for pre-game warm-ups. They called him by his name. Calling him by his name seems like nothing but that meant a ton to him. Make sure your players (young-men) know how much of positive effect they have had on Sam off the court. We love to watch them play but the simple high-fives and interactions they have had personally have meant so much more than the final scores of the games. You have a great group of players and we wish them the best in life both on and off the court.

I want you to know that our family and many others truly appreciate the support your foundation and AUtlive have given to Smile-A-Mile and A-Team Ministries. These are two organizations that have directly supported our family through this journey. Just as you and the team have made Sam feel special, Smile-A-Mile has been there to remind our entire family to live life and smile. They do a great job of not letting cancer be a thief and take over every aspect for our lives.

Thanks again for your friendship with Sam. Seeing him smile and feeling extra special has been a great outlet from his daily grind beating Leukemia.

War Eagle

The Cunningham

Patrick, Lisa, Sam, Luke and Zac