

East Alton-Wood River's Wyatt Owens Receives Overwhelming Support During Cancer Battle

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
February 9 2024 10:36 AM



WOOD RIVER - On Dec. 7, 2023, the Owens family got the news that no one wants to hear. That one of their sons has been diagnosed with cancer.

That day, Wyatt Owens was told he was suffering from Hodgkin lymphoma, and since then, he's rallied not only a hockey team, but an entire league and town behind him.

Wyatt, a senior at East Alton-Wood River High School and a member of the Oilers' hockey team, is doing well his dad Bill said Thursday night after EAWR's dramatic shootout win over Highland in game one of the MVCHA playoffs.

"He's actually doing really well," Bill said. "The cancer treatment is going good. He occasionally has side effects from the chemo, but other than that he's just looking forward to getting it over with."

Wyatt has been having chemotherapy treatments. According to his dad he'll do one week on and two weeks off. Monday was the final day of his third cycle.

Bill said that Wyatt was been feeling sick for weeks leading up to his diagnosis. Wyatt's parents noticed his performance on the ice declining and knew something was wrong.

"We noticed a big drop in his work ethic in hockey," Bill said. "Last year he was an assistant captain and on the All-Star team and all that. But, going into this season he just wasn't feeling it for some reason."

"He started getting a cough, was always really tired," Bill continued. "So, we took him to the doctor a couple of times thinking it was Covid or something."

The doctors couldn't find anything wrong with Wyatt. It wasn't until his third run in that blood work was done. When the results came back showing that he had a high white blood cell count, they went from there.

During the Owens family's hard times, they have received outstanding support from all around, beginning with the Oilers hockey team and the entire MVCHA.

" from this hockey team has been amazing, but the league in general has been amazing," Bill said. "So many teams have reached out. So many players have taped their sticks green to show support. A couple teams made donations to him. It's just amazing how much we battle on the ice, but off the ice everybody cares about him."



"It's amazing to see the hockey community come together like this," EAWR head coach James Mitchell said. "We're all rivals on the ice, but we all grew up together, they all know each other, and everyone's supporting him."

The support doesn't stop there. All of East Alton-Wood River High School is behind Wyatt as well.

"The high school, from the very moment we knew anything, the school's been taking care of him," Bill said. "The cheerleaders, the big sisters club, the counseling department, the teachers, everybody has had a hand in trying to keep up his moral support."

Just last Saturday, EAWR held a basketball shootout. It featured six games throughout the day. During each game it ran a 50-50 drawing. It raised over \$900 for Wyatt and his family.



He's even receiving support from the St. Louis Blues Warriors, and the St. Louis Blues themselves. According to Bill, next Thursday they are going to sit in Brayden Schenn's (the Blues' captain) personal box.

"From all the different levels, hockey has been amazing to him," Bill said.

"It really puts things into perspective that life is so much bigger than the game of hockey," Alton head coach Bryan Clark said. "But the hockey community in general and the way that everybody locally has gotten behind Wyatt, he's one of our brothers as well."

Wyatt, dealing with some side effects of the chemo, is in and out of school, going about 50 percent of the time right now according to his dad. As for playing hockey, he made one exception for that.

On Monday, during the MVCHA Class 1A All-Star Game, Wyatt shocked the crowd and played his first game in over over two months.

It's actually a funny story as Wyatt didn't exactly have permission from his parents to do so.

"So, the kid, he was supposed to dress for warm ups and then sit the bench," Mitchell said. "He was going to do the skills competition during the first intermission. So, as I'm coming to the bench he's just standing in line like he's ready to play hockey, ready to play the next shift."

"I'm like 'Wyatt, you playing?' and he's like 'Yep'. I'm like 'You sure? You feel good?' and he's like 'Yeah, I'm good'. I asked 'Are your parents going to be okay?' and he just tells me 'I'm good coach.' The kid just had chemo that morning," Mitchell said.

And that's true. As mentioned before, Monday was Wyatt's final day of his third cycle of chemotherapy. He felt good enough to play, so he did.

"So, my understanding was Wyatt was going to dress and do some of the skills competitions which is awesome," Clark said. "I'm sure he was itching to get out there. But, next thing I know, he says that he's playing. I know coach Mitchell and myself both asked him if it was okay with his parents, and he said yeah, so he went out there, evidently on his own accord, that' wasn't clear."

"Me and Mitchell discussed letting him go out and do warmups and do one of the All-Star skills competitions, but he told coach before the game that he felt good and had permission to play," Bill said.

"So, they let him play and mom tracked Mitchell down between periods and asked what the hell was going on. He said Wyatt told me he was good to play. At that point he had already played a whole period, let's let him finish it."

Clark and Mitchell, who were coaching the Navy All-Star team, which consisted of players from EAWR, Alton, and Highland, were just happy to see Wyatt back out on the ice.

"The All-Star game, when he came up for the introduction, every player on the ice gave a stick tap and the stands went nuts," Mitchell said. "It's awesome to see it. Words cannot explain what we're witnessing right now."

"I feel bad that I didn't double check a little bit, but I'm happy for him to get that opportunity," Clark said. "It was great to see him out there."

And it all ends with even better news. The chemotherapy is doing its job.

"He's taking the treatment very well," Bill said. "The treatment is downsizing the cancer as fast as they'd hoped. So, by this summer, we're hoping this is nothing more than a bad memory."

"He's going to kick cancer's ass," Clark said. "I'm excited to see him get through that."