

Beat Cancer with a Bat – High School Softball Team Plays to Save Lives

BY LAURA MCCLELLAN

Never underestimate the power of high school students with a passion. The players on the East Surry High School softball team from Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, are those kind of students. Their dedication and hard work raised \$2,100 for cancer research in just one night.

On April 6, 2011, the team participated in a fundraiser entitled “Beat Cancer with a Bat,” which benefits the National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR). The campaign invites softball teams across the country – whether high school, college or community teams – to participate by committing to donate proceeds from at least one game to NFCR.



“Our community has been hit hard with cancer,” said Andrea Kittrell, parent of East Surry player Jessica Barker. “Most recently my dad – Jessica’s grandfather – has been diagnosed, and as of right now there is no cure. He has been fighting cancer for 18 months.”

With these thoughts as motivation, Kittrell and her daughter led the East Surry team to fight against the disease by participating in “Beat Cancer with a Bat.”

“All our players – junior varsity and varsity – rallied around them to make it a success,” said East Surry head coach Derrick Hill.

Not only did the softball team get involved, but the student body of East Surry also came together and showed its support by purchasing T-shirts the team had made and attending the game.

“The fans were beyond amazing,” Barker said. “Even after the event, people have been wearing their shirts randomly. It just brings back that amazing night all over again.”

The team also sold balloons at the event on which attendees

could write the names of loved ones who have battled cancer. The East Surry players released the balloons in their honor at the game.

Kittrell’s father threw out the first pitch – a touching moment for many who participated.

“Catching for my grandpa, throwing out the first pitch brought tears to my eyes,” said Barker, whose usual position is shortstop.

An estimated 100 people attended the game against Starmount High School, but a victory over the opposing team was not the first priority of the players and fans that night.

“Going out on the field, we knew that night’s festivities were

way more than just softball,” said East Surry left fielder Kelsey Wilson. “We had a real purpose.”

Joining hands to accomplish something beyond simply winning the game brought the team closer and strengthened its sense of community.

“All our players working toward one goal builds chemistry and unity,” Hill said. “It’s an outstanding team-building event.”

The money raised went directly to NFCR and will be used to fund life-saving research for all types of cancer.

“Whether we won or lost that night, in our hearts we truly knew either way we had won, no matter what the outcome,” Barker said.

To learn more about Beat Cancer with a Bat or to get involved, visit www.nfcr.org/beatcancerwithabat or call 1-800-321-CURE. ©

Laura McClellan is a writer from Nashville, Tennessee, who works with the National Foundation for Cancer Research, which is located in Bethesda, Maryland.