

The Patriot-News

Coach Dieter's back in play, thanks to donation of kidney

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Kids know what they're getting with high school coach and teacher Pat Dieter.

He doesn't coddle. He doesn't let kids cut his advanced placement government class or skip basketball practice.

But Dieter does give his Boiling Springs High School students and varsity players straight answers, feedback that builds character and a stand-in parent when they need one.

Proof that his style brings out their best came Tuesday when a former star basketball guard gave one of his kidneys to save Dieter's life.

Doctors removed a kidney from Kevin Roher, a 1990 graduate who is one of nine 1,000-point scorers in the school's history, and implanted it in Dieter, whose diseased kidneys were failing.

Yesterday, as Roher and Dieter recalled their time as player and coach -- sporting matching gowns and holding pillows to their incisions as they laughed in Dieter's Harrisburg Hospital room -- it was hard to tell who benefited more.

Roher, 34, insisted it is him.

"He's one of the warmest-feeling people you'll ever meet," he said. "I remember the first time I met Pat. I was a hyperactive kid. I pitched a fit [at a summer ball camp], and he gave me hell."

Dieter channeled Roher's energy into a record-setting career, took a fatherly role when Roher's father died and appointed Roher to an assistant coach position at the high school.

Roher asked Dieter to be his best man in his wedding to wife Kris and named his son after Dieter.

Dieter said Roher was one of few in whom he confided that his kidneys were worn out and that he was on a waiting list for a cadaver organ. Recently, as his kidneys faltered, causing sometimes painful side effects, Dieter prepared himself to begin dialysis. He has had kidney disease since he was 7.

Roher kept quiet about the calls he made to the PinnacleHealth transplant program to learn if he could become a direct donor to Dieter.

Kim Barnett, director of the program, said at least half of living donors are not related to recipients. She said the program gets three or four kidneys a year from good Samaritans who donate without specifying a recipient.

"More and more, the public is becoming aware that they can, if they're healthy, be evaluated as a potential

kidney donor," she said.

"I'm just one of many [players] who'd do this for him," Roher said.

"As amazing as it is to me, it doesn't shock me because I know his character," Dieter said. "Kevin knew I was sick. He researched it. By Kevin stepping up, I got out of having to have dialysis."

Despite his illness, Dieter stayed in good physical condition, his wife, Jen, said, and doctors marveled at how quickly after surgery the transplanted kidney began to function.

"I don't know how I'm going to thank him. I've been blessed," Dieter said. "I've been blessed in getting this kidney, but it's more than that. It's the relationship all of us have in our basketball program."

He'll be able to return to school in a few weeks. Coaching will have to wait a bit longer.

Roher, who took a break from coaching, will be back, too.

Will he see a change in his mentor's gruff style?

"It'll probably be hard to yell at Kevin now," Dieter said.

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