

Cancer compels her to fight for others

Downers Grove South's Patton helps raise money

BY MATT LE CREN

Two years ago, Downers Grove South volleyball player Casey Patton was dreaming about playing in college.

Now, the senior is fighting for her life against a rare, deadly disease. Her athletic career is over, but her will to win is stronger than ever.

Patton began having vision problems in February 2006. Last fall, she was diagnosed with optic glioma, a malignant tumor inside her optic nerve. Brain surgery was done last October, but the tumor proved to be inoperable.

"I had just run the Chicago Triathlon in August," Patton said. "I was a very active person, and it didn't really sink in. When I started chemo, I started realizing that my life would never be the same."

Patton began an 18-month course

of chemotherapy treatments at Children's Memorial Hospital last Nov. 22, a day before her 17th birthday. The medication made her weak and depressed, but being around cancer patients much younger than her inspired her to do something to help them.

After learning that only 3 percent of federal cancer research funding was allocated to pediatrics, Patton and friends Aileen Reed, Brittany Robbins and Susan Donner hatched a plan to raise money for cancer research at Children's Memorial. They launched the "Be the Cure" campaign in May and began selling T-shirts with that slogan for \$12. The goal was to raise \$3,500.

The campaign far surpassed it. The Downers South volleyball team wore the shirts instead of their regular jerseys during their win last

Wednesday over Downers Grove North, and Patton — a member of the choir and aspiring Broadway singer — sang the national anthem. Fans bought 125 shirts and donated an additional \$1,300. A total of 1,093 shirts have been sold and \$16,872 raised.

"I'm so grateful that they did this," Patton said. "Even the Downers North people bought them for warmup jerseys. I've been so overwhelmed that this is happening. It's a blessing."

Watching their former teammate go through an ordeal that makes walking to her car exhausting has the Mustangs counting their blessings.

"We wanted to do something special for her," senior setter Katie Crawford said. "She's a strong kid. It takes a lot for a young kid to do that, and I give her kudos for that."



The "Be The Cure" team of Susan Donner, Brittany Robbins, Casey Patton and Aileen Reed has raised \$16,872 for pediatric cancer research. Patton, a former Downers Grove South volleyball player, has optic glioma. | FOR THE SUN-TIMES

"It's amazing how she's dealt with everything, and she has such an awesome attitude about everything," junior Kelsey Safranek said. "Every time we have a timeout we're like, 'Do this for Casey, she deserves it.'"

Patton, who plans to end the campaign in December, goes to school part-time but with the help of online classes and tutors will graduate on time in June. The long-term survival rate for her cancer is 70 percent, and her tumor has shrunk 25 percent, so doctors are hopeful she will make a

full recovery.

"I don't want or need to be remembered as the girl [who raised money]," Patton said. "I want people to realize that things like this are what make a difference in these kids' lives. These kids need our help, and the doctors need the help for the research."

"I would do this all over again if it meant that nobody would have to go through [cancer]."

For more information, visit Casey's Web site at www.be-the-cure.com.