

Who Was Brett?

Brett Gosnell was born in Hickory, NC, on January 28, 1986, to Mary Ann and Mark Gosnell. He was the oldest of their three boys. His younger brothers are Scott and Matthew. He attended Hickory Public Schools, including Oakwood Elementary, Grandview Middle School, and Hickory High.

Brett was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma on April 8, 2003 after he noticed lumps on his side and foot. Rhabdo is a rare muscle cancer that primarily affects young people. Brett immediately began treatment at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center as several tumors were discovered in his chest, pancreas, spine, and foot. He told his parents and doctors that he wanted to live his life as normally as he could while going through treatment. He missed very little school during his treatments, which involved both chemotherapy and radiation. After chemo he was always determined to get out of the hospital and to get up and on his feet as quickly as he could.



Of all Brett's interests growing up, school and sports seemed to be the ones he was most passionate about. Excelling in school was always a high priority for Brett. He won the Top Scholar award at Grandview for finishing middle school with the highest cumulative grade-point average. He continued that success in high school, graduating as Valedictorian of Hickory High in 2004, even though he spent some of his junior and most of his senior year undergoing cancer treatment. Dissatisfied with his score on the math section of the SAT his junior year (740 out of a possible 800), he was determined to improve it. Against the advice of his parents, Brett took the SAT again a few days after a chemo treatment. This time he made a perfect score on the math portion, giving him a cumulative 1570 on the test overall. Brett even attended Governor's School West in the summer of 2003, arranging his chemo schedule to accommodate it. His fellow students at Hickory High voted Brett "Student of the Year" his senior year, and he was offered academic scholarships from Vanderbilt and the University of North Carolina.

Sports were always a high priority for Brett. As a child, he participated in most of the sports offered by the Hickory Recreation Department. Brett concentrated on physical fitness, and even at an early age he ran in many road races as a youngster. He won a silver medal at the NC State Games track and field championships in 1996. When he went to Grandview he played football, basketball, and baseball, but football became his favorite sport. He concentrated on football in high school, earning varsity letters both his sophomore and junior years. Brett could not play his senior year due to his cancer treatments, but he remained on the team and missed only one game. He missed the first game of the year because he had yet to talk his doctors into switching his chemo from Friday to Saturday. After he convinced them that he had to be at the games on Friday, his doctors arranged a special schedule so that he could get his chemo treatments on Saturday and still not miss school.

Some other achievements Brett was recognized for during his cancer treatment include the Presidential Award for Educational Excellence, a Charlotte Observer Top Scholar award, a WSOC-TV Honor Graduate Award, the DAR US History Silver Medal, the Hickory High Football Academic Award, the AP English Award, and the Corning AP Chemistry Award. Brett also served as President of the National Honor Society at Hickory High and was on the Hickory Youth Council.

Brett inspired many with his attitude and determination through his struggle with cancer. He attended the University of Virginia and maintained a 3.8 GPA even though he had to arrange afternoon classes in order to take chemo treatments in the mornings at UVa Medical Center.

Brett became too ill to attend classes and moved home to Hickory in March 2006. He lost his battle to cancer on August 17, 2006. He was at home with his family and special friend Stephanie Cothren when he died.