

A Coach and Player win the Game of Life

It is a story that reaffirms one's faith in humans. The Associated Press headline last month read: "Coach Donates Kidney to Player." It didn't take long to learn that Tom Walter, the baseball coach at Wake Forest University, had donated one of his kidneys to Kevin Jordan, a freshman outfielder who had never suited up for the team.

The story of the White Coach donating a kidney to a Black athlete from Columbus, Georgia transcends sports; it supersedes the strong bond that unites a coach with his players. It is not a commentary on Black-White relationships. Rather, it is a story of two courageous people whose commitments to each other went beyond offering or accepting an athletic scholarship.

Kevin Jordan, now 19, was one of the nation's top baseball prospects as a student at Northside-Columbus High in Georgia. He had made the all-city team and was so good that the New York Yankees drafted him. But, Jordan signed a letter of intent to attend Wake Forest and unlike many young athletes tempted by money, he planned to keep his commitment.

"Kevin is one of the most highly touted players in the country," Coach Walter said at the time. "He possesses game-changing speed ... plus power. He is the kind of offensive talent that opposing coaches have to manage around. He will be an impact player from the moment he sets foot on campus."

During Jordan's senior year in high school, before he would have an opportunity to set foot on the campus of Wake Forest University

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



, he noticed that he had begun to tire easily. It was the winter of 2009 and his reflexes were noticeably slower. At first, everyone thought he had the flu. By last April, the 6'1," 185-pounder had lost 30 pounds.

Doctors in Columbus, Georgia sent him to Emory University Hospital, in Atlanta, for additional tests. It was determined that Jordan was suffering from something far more serious than flu. He was diagnosed with ANCA vasculitis, which occurs when one's immune system begins attacking

spring, several months later he was on dialysis three times a week.

But, Jordan had given his word to Coach Walter and he was determined to keep it.

Keith Jordan, the star athlete's father, told CBS' College Sports Network: "The thing he told us, because as parents we're always trying to look out for his best interests, and (his) mother is always trying to make sure 'Is this what you want to do?' His focus was, 'I want to live as normal a life as I can. I've committed to the school and I want to do whatever I can to live up to that commitment.'"

Last August, Jordan enrolled in Wake Forest. Two days before classes, Jordan, his family, Coach Walter, and the team's athletic trainer visited Dr. Barry Freeman at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C.

"We had been communicating with the Jordans last spring and through the summer," Walter told CBS. "But I had no idea of the extent of Kevin's condition until that doctor's appointment... That's when the reality, the gravity of the situation hit me."

Dr. Freeman reported that Jordan's kidney function had dropped to only 8 percent of

capacity. Before long, the decision was made to increase dialysis from three times a week to every day. Rather than travel to the dialysis center every day, Jordan and Jeff Strahm, the baseball trainer, were taught how to self-administer the dialysis.

Jordan would attend classes each day and at 11 p.m., he would hook up his dialysis machine and

in the U.S.

Jordan's mother and brother were tested as possible kidney donors but neither was a match. Jordan's father was excluded because of high blood pressure. After relatives were unable to donate a kidney, that's when Coach Walter stepped up to the plate.

He underwent compatibility tests last December in Winston-Salem and a month later at Emory. At 8 a.m., Monday, February 7, Walter was wheeled into

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Kevin Jordan

the operating room at Emory University hospital for the 90-minute procedure. By 11:15 a.m., Walter's kidney was transplanted to Jordan, the outfielder who had not played a minute at Wake Forest. By 4 p.m. both men had recovered from surgery and were back in their hospital rooms.

Under normal circumstances, Jordan's name would be placed on a waiting list and there are never enough donors to meet the need. According to the United Network of Organ Sharing, there are more than 80,000 people awaiting a kidney transplant. In 2009, there were only 10,442 donors (For more information, check out the National Kidney Foundation at www.kidney.org).

Blacks made up 12 percent of the U.S. population, but only three percent of organ donors. According to the National Kidney Foundation, African-Americans constitute about 29 percent of all patients treated for kidney failure

"Kevin even showing up on our campus was a courageous act on his part, certainly far more courageous than [what] I'm doing" Walter said. "Certainly Kevin and I are going to forever be joined at the hip."

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"Certainly Kevin and I are going to forever be joined at the hip."

Coach Tom Walter

the healthy cells in the body. In this case, the ANCAs (Anti-Neutrophil Cytoplasmic Autoantibodies) were attacking the walls of the small blood cells in Jordan's kidneys. The swelling caused blood and protein to leak into his urine, which in turn caused the kidneys to operate at about 15 to 20 percent of capacity.

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