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Moorman honored to help

Bills punter's charity gets recognized

By RACHEL GEORGE
News Sports Reporter

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Taylor Speth has made quite an impression on Bills punter Brian Moorman.

PITTSFORD - Shortly after his sister Carly's death from brain cancer in 2002, Matthew Collard was having a hard time at school. His classmates knew about his loss, but no one could talk about it. Ultimately, it was someone else talking - reading, actually - who helped him through it.

Bills punter Brian Moorman, having met Carly and having worked with the organization she started, Carly's Club for Kids and Cancer Research, helped Matthew through his tough time, just as he has with many other patients and their families in Western New York. For Matthew, he came in to read to his class at school.

"When Brian came in, it really gave him the opportunity to not focus on (Carly's death) and focus on having a professional athlete read to the class," said Chuck Collard, Matthew and Carly's dad and the chairman of Carly's Club. "He just really is a remarkable person and helped my family through a difficult time in our lives."

Moorman's work with Carly's Club and other charities around Buffalo has earned him the seventh annual Pro Football Weekly Arthur S. Arkush Humanitarian Award, which he will receive today. He was nominated for the NFL's Walter Payton Award in 2003.

Since Moorman came to Buffalo in 2001, he and his wife, Amber, have been active in helping pediatric cancer patients at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and at Women and Children's Hospital.

"I don't do these things for awards or anything like that," Moorman said. "We got involved in Roswell because it became our passion to be involved with the kids and try to make a difference. For this to come up, it's really an honor."

In his first year in Buffalo, Moorman met Taylor Speth, a little boy with cancer and a patient at Roswell making Christmas cards at a party at Ralph Wilson Stadium. After talking to Taylor, Moorman knew he wanted to help.

"We just sat down and hit it off and became really good friends that day," Moorman said. "From then on we kept in touch."

Moorman has read at Taylor's school, too. Like all of the kids Moorman visits, Taylor made an impression on him, one that may only be matched by the ones he makes on them.

"It's more rewarding than anything else in the world," Moorman said. "It's amazing to me that just because I wear a jersey on Sunday afternoon that I can bring a smile to a kid's face. But if I can make a difference in their lives, then I don't know why I wouldn't do it."

Moorman also met Carly before she died and built a relationship with her family that remains strong.

"She had an impeccable judge of character," Chuck Collard said, "and right away her and Brian hit it off really well. He made her feel special."

To those who know Moorman and have seen him volunteer his time, this is an honor Moorman deserves. He and Amber regularly visit the children and their families at Roswell. During the season, Chuck Collard knows they'll be there almost every Tuesday - the Bills' day off during the week. He knows that almost every one of the 225 families in Carly's Club has a story about how Moorman helped them.

"He spends so much time each week when he's off visiting the institute," Chuck Collard said. "I think the nice thing about it is Brian has the ability to make the kids forget what they're going through, even if it's only for a short time."

"It's a whole other kind of medicine," said Martin Brecher, a pediatric oncologist at Roswell. "The emotional aspect of the illness is very significant."

"He's someone the kids look up to. They feel very special when he's there. They feel like they're getting personal attention from someone they admire."

So are the families. The Moormans started the P.U.N.T. Foundation a year ago with the purpose of trying to help families during their difficult time. While the Moormans are still getting the organization off the ground, they have raised about \$20,000 and are planning events and looking for more sponsors.

"It's not that we don't feel like research is important. It's so important," Moorman said. "But there's so many groups out there that give so much to research that we thought, 'Let's give something that's going to go directly to the families right now.'"

The foundation has started a program called Brian's Locker, which gives families of pediatric cancer patients things such as gas cards, clothes and restaurant gift certificates for when their child has to travel to Roswell for treatments.

Chuck Collard has known how important Moorman's contributions are and is glad he's being recognized for it.

"It's no longer the child that has cancer. It's the child who knows Brian Moorman," Collard said. "The impression that he leaves is everlasting."

e-mail: rgeorge@buffnews.com

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