



Mike Newsome: A coach's return

By Lymarie Jackson | Posted: Sunday, June 16, 2013 6:00 am

Mike Newsome is a walking miracle, defying odds by just being alive.

But this man, who has devoted so much of himself to the youth of the Roanoke Valley, is now seeing the selfless attention returned to him, as a community of family, friends and athletes pour themselves out to help him on the road to a most unlikely recovery from a devastating and debilitating stroke.

His ultimate goal is to make it back to his first love of coaching. Newsome is well on his way.

Three months ago, Newsome suffered from a type of stroke called Vertebral Artery Dissection, meaning, unlike familiar strokes where clots are thrown and impede blood supply in the brain, in Newsome's case an artery in his brain stem tore. According to Newsome, most patients who suffer that type of stroke die.

Those who survive generally live the remainder of their lives in a vegetative state. Newsome said doctors told him only one of every 100 patients recover with a good outcome.

Newsome spent nearly a month in the hospital and in a rehab facility in Raleigh before being sent home April 9. He was not sent home because he was doing well but rather because issues with blood pressure and falls during rehab caused him to be too much of a risk for the facility.

They ordered him to home-health rehabilitation and told him he would be in a wheelchair the rest of his life.

The wheelchair lasted two days. He had to relearn from scratch, but he now moves smoothly with a walker and can do most things on his own, though his faithful wife Jeane has been constantly by his side during his recovery.

Just last week, he attended his first event without her — Roanoke Valley girls' softball game. Through tears, he credited the Lord, his wife and the unending support from the Roanoke Valley for his astounding and continuing recovery. He recalls his journey with a thankful attitude.

"As cold as this world is, the generous way people have responded to me is warming to my heart," he said.

The beginning

March 14, 2013, began as an ordinary day for Newsome. He was in his familiar spot on the softball diamond as head coach of the Varsity KIPP Softball team, when he found himself unable to move.

He attributed the problem to an ongoing battle with vertigo and blood sugar, but when he woke up the next morning unable to put his feet on the floor, he and Jeane knew there was something serious going on.

Newsome said his wife almost literally picked him up to put him in their car and drove him to WakeMed in Raleigh. He spent a week in the hospital before being transferred to their rehab facility, and the hometown support began almost immediately.

Newsome said he had not been in the rehab facility for an hour when former player Alyssa Baker showed up at his door with a huge homemade card signed by some of the many athletes he has coached. He smiled through his tears as he described Alyssa's mother telling him Alyssa would not go to bed the night before traveling to Raleigh to see her former coach, though it had been four years since he had coached her.

Kindness

The outpouring of attention and acts of kindness have not stopped during the months since the stroke. The Newsomes came home from rehab to the Rosemary Baptist Church men's group, led by Mike Askew, building a sturdy wheelchair ramp at their front door to facilitate movement.

Numerous members of the community, including his church family at Rosemary Methodist, have made calls and visits, sent food and cards, all encouraging him and lifting his spirits — motivating him to improve as he has done for the countless athletes he has taught and encouraged since he began coaching in 1969.

Newsome is astounded by the attention has not died down.

“It is normal for people to reach out during the first weeks of something like this happening, but I have people surrounding me that still come by every day,” he said.

He wakes up almost every morning to a call from KIPP athletic director Diego Hasty, who drives to Roanoke Rapids from Northampton County to help Newsome with his daily exercise. They have worked their way up to walking nearly a mile daily, back and forth on a neighbor's long driveway.

Newsome says Hasty keeps him accountable and focused on his recovery. During the day, the Newsomes have come to count on neighbor Dennis Gaylor's random acts of kindness.

“We don't even ask before he acts,” said Newsome.

Added Jeane, “he cleaned our gutters, takes out our trash. He is so thoughtful and active for us, sometimes we forget he isn't an actual member of our family.”

Before bed, Newsome counts on friend Tim Bratton's nightly calls, checking in on him and his progress.

Newsome still has a long road ahead of him to reach his goal of coaching KIPP softball next spring, but he is confident the support he has been given will help him get back to his team.

The team, which dedicated the 2013 season to Newsome, won the Tar Roanoke Athletic Conference, and Newsome was named Coach of the Year.

“The home health staff took good care of me and just this Tuesday I started out-patient therapy with Arnold Brown,” Newsome said. “I know he is going to get me where I need to be.

“I believe the doctors when they tell me there is nothing that they could have done for me to have made me come out of this stroke the way that I have. I just know that the good Lord has blessed me and has work for me to do still.”