



The Class of 2031 Travel Baseball Teams help Strike Out Pediatric Cancer!

By Kristen Daley Photos Provided by Christine FitzPatrick and Alexis Brooks

On Sunday, May 23rd, 2021 the two Ramsey 8U Travel baseball teams played in the inaugural Class of 2031 Tommy Strong Fundraising game. The atmosphere was electric! Ballpark music filled the air, turquoise balloons surrounded Finch Park, and two opposing teams of 2nd grade baseball players from the same blue and gold heart of Ramsey played some terrific baseball, all to raise money and awareness in honor of their friend and honorary classmate, Tommy FitzPatrick.

May is Pediatric Brain Cancer Awareness month. My son Bryce and his friend Jackson were best buddies with Tommy after meeting one another at LEAP preschool when they were just 2 ½ years old. They affectionately called each other “bros”. They should have had more time for playdates, doing the silly things that little boys do together, and playing sports, such as baseball. Tommy tragically lost his battle with brain cancer at 6 years old.

I had been in conversation a few months ago with Christine, Tommy’s mother, about holding some sort of fundraising event by the Class of 2031 for the Tommy Strong Foundation, a foundation Tommy’s parents, Andrew and Christine, created to raise money to help fund pediatric cancer research and to aide families experiencing the hardships of having to undergo pediatric cancer treatments. When we saw that both 2nd grade 8U travel teams would be playing one another in a regular season game on May 23rd, my husband Brian and I jumped on this as an opportunistic time to teach our young boys that we can come together as one united team to give back and do something really awesome. And awesome it was!!!

The inaugural Class of 2031 Tommy Strong Fundraiser Baseball Game was perhaps the most perfect example of how a community

comes together and rallies when needed. Organized in under two weeks, it was beyond anyone’s expectations all because of the altruistic community we live in and the supportive and loving families who live in Ramsey. It was an absolute group effort and perhaps one of Ramsey’s finest moments.

John and Bobbie Dugan and the Ramsey Baseball and Softball Association were integral in making this event happen. John Dugan, President of the RBSA, went above and beyond to make our event so meaningful. Along with RBSA’s Matt Miller, the Dugan’s lined the fields in “turquoist”, set up a “turquoist” pitcher’s mound and bases, placed “turquoist” umbrellas outside of the snack stand, and tied dozens and dozens of “turquoist” balloons around Finch Park Field #2. As you could guess, “turquoist” was Tommy’s favorite col-

or. Coach Chris Tedeschi expedited the making of “We Are Tommy Strong” baseball jerseys that each team wore for the game, and the RBSA made Tommy Strong Foundation banners that were hung in both dugouts and in center field.

The events began with emotional speeches, the Dugan’s presentation of a one-of-a kind Tommy Strong Major League Baseball base to the FitzPatrick family (hand painted by Hubbard art teacher Michelle Megna), and a beautifully sung National Anthem by 4th grade Dater student, Cecelia Lobue. After the ceremonial first pitch, thrown by Tommy’s brother and sister, Jack and Sophie, the players from each of the 8U Travel teams, led by coaches Brian Daley and Tommy Lobue, were called out onto the field. We wanted the boys to experience not only the excitement and energy of the day, but of course the meaning behind it. Not every player had a personal connection to Tommy FitzPatrick. However, teaching our children about compassion, charity, and giving back to others in need was our goal. A donation page was set up online for the Tommy Strong baseball game. However, to make a more personal connection, when each player was announced, they ran onto the field and made their own donations in the turquoise Tommy Strong bucket.

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Ramsey dad and baseball coach, Mike Featherstone, hilariously entertained both the players and spectators with player stats, interviews, trivia, and play by play commentary. His son, and Ramsey High School baseball player, Michael, ran the 50/50. Dads of the players were the unofficial grounds crew and groomed the field between innings to a surprise YMCA performance. Children, parents, and even the umpire, Brian, ran the bases. There was a "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" sing-along, surprise visits from Ramsey teachers and principals, and a visit and post-game team chat by Ramsey Varsity baseball coach, Paul Urbanovich.

The action and fundraising didn't start and end on the field. Proceeds from the RBSA snack stand and specially made Tommy Strong baked goodies from Ramsey's Sugar Gems (Hilary Meyer) and supporter Antonia Calabro Matz were all donated to the day's fundraising events. At the time of submitting this story, our little sluggers raised over \$5,000 for the Tommy Strong Foundation.

To say my heart was bursting that Sunday morning on May 23rd would be an understatement. I felt such gratitude to Andrew, Christine, Jack and Sophie FitzPatrick for allowing us to do something of this magnitude for their beloved Tommy. It was celebratory, it was tearful, it was entertaining, it was inspiring. Most of all, it was a beautiful day full of children, families, and members of our Ramsey community all

working together to raise awareness and funds for pediatric cancer. At one point during the day, I heard my 8 year old son say, "Who cares about the score?! That's not what today is about!" To know the FitzPatrick family, and to have been Tommy's friend, makes us all better people. There is no one I know of in our Ramsey community who wouldn't do anything for them or help them in their mission to finding a cure for pediatric cancer. When a community rallies together and supports one another, everyone wins.

May we all continue to teach our children that no matter how young or little they are they are never too small to make a very big difference. Children can help children. We are all Tommy Strong!!! The Class of 2031, our teams, and our community will continue to fight for "Team Turquist" and help the Tommy Strong Foundation strike out pediatric cancer once and for all.

I can't wait for next year's game.

