



I LOVE YOU, MAN

Ladue's lifelong sports fan dedicated his time to friendship with players

Robert "Bobby" Elzemeyer stands with former Ladue athlete Elliot Loitman at a soccer game. He wore a plastic hat from Firehouse Subs to every soccer game as a good luck charm after visiting the restaurant with the team. "I think a great legacy he leaves is that beautiful moments and beautiful friendships can emerge from someone who is a complete stranger," junior Hayden Zych said, "The only thing that separates you is 44 years." (photo courtesy of Ladue Soccer)

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When senior Dylan Stern arrived at his Ladue soccer practice without cleats, he knew he was in trouble. Facing an entire practice in Crocs, he turned to Robert "Bobby" Elzemeyer, a honorary member of the team who attended nearly every soccer practice, and asked if he could wear his tattered Nike shoes. Without hesitation, Elzemeyer traded Stern for his Crocs and spent the rest of practice smiling on the sideline, knowing he had helped a friend.

A lifelong sports fan, Elzemeyer spent countless hours with Ladue sports teams in the 44 years since he graduated from Ladue Horton Watkins High School in 1976. He built relationships with as many athletes as he could, always greeting them with a bear hug and his trademark phrase "I love you, man." Elzemeyer passed away Dec. 20 due to complications from COVID-19, and current Ladue athletes wish they could get time with him back.

"After a game that we lost, I didn't want to talk to Bobby, [I said] 'You know what, man, get away from me. I'm just going home,'" junior Hayden Zych said. "Those are the moments you regret; those are moments that make you think 'This guy really is more than we are. He's a better person than we are.' In times where we need him — maybe we need a good pat on the back, for him to say, 'Hey, and it's gonna be okay, we'll get 'em next week' — Bobby was always that."

Elzemeyer's love for sports began as a child, when he would start his chores at dawn so he would finish before the first sports game. Even when he got grounded from the television and could not watch sports at home, he found any way he could to tune in.

"He always had a way of getting around the rules," Carolyn Crowley, Elzemeyer's sister, said. "One time he was grounded, [so] he walked up to one of the stores, one with TVs in the front. He would go into the store and ask them to turn the station because he was watching the TV through the window, probably pacing the sidewalk."

Elzemeyer has been around some Ladue sports longer than anyone else in the program. Current boy's varsity basketball coach Chad Anderson first started coaching at Ladue in 2000, and by that point, Elzemeyer had already become a regular at team events.

"I think he became a member of our family dating back to before I was here," Anderson said. "He's been all around basketball, but he's around every sport. Just having him in the gym was like having another member of the team."

Traveling to distant games and attending early morning practices helped foster a bond between Elzemeyer and the student athletes he spent time with. Even away from practice, he checked in on his friends consistently through text messages and phone calls.

"Bobby would call three times a day," Zych said. "When I picked up the phone, he would just want to talk and say how much of a friend I am to him. He would always thank me for being his friend. It never occurred to me how important that is in a friendship or how important it is to him."

Ladue alumni speak about what Bobby meant to them

LASTING LEGACY

SCOTT STERN

class of 1976

My favorite memory about Bob Elzemeyer was from the 2018 district soccer finals featuring Ladue vs. Clayton. Of course, Bob was invited to sit on the sidelines by Coach Aronberg. In overtime, Grayson Francis scored the game winning goal and the students ran onto the field. After a few minutes, the soccer team all got together for a team picture holding the district championship trophy. The photo included the team and the coaching and they allowed one other person to be in the photo. Of course, that person was Bob. As always, the team and coaches treated him like one of the family and I'll always remember the smile in his face as he stood with the team wearing his worn Ladue baseball hat. I'll never forget how happy he was at that moment.

JOSH HORWITZ

class of 2018

Bobby was not a fan of Ladue basketball, he was a member of our family. If Bobby missed a practice, or wasn't in the locker room before a game, something was wrong. Every day he would give me a big hug and say "I love you, man." Bobby was an incredible friend and I think about him every day."

JOHN HOUGH

class of 2014

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Being a part of the team meant inclusion in events like end-of-season banquets. The boys soccer team moved to an online celebration because of COVID-19, so Elzemeyer received help from Zych to set up Zoom on his computer.

"The juniors' job [for the banquet] was to deliver either senior gifts or food to coaches," Zych said. "I got to deliver to Bob because I helped him set up his Zoom. I dropped off the food, and I went home like a normal night. The next morning he called and told me that he had COVID."

After Elzemeyer lost his fight with COVID-19, a funeral was held in which six different Ladue coaches were pallbearers. Anderson was moved by reflections from Elzemeyer's closest friends.

"He was just such a genuine, thankful person that loved people," Anderson said. "I really realized that when I attended [the funeral], because there were so many people that had so many nice things to say about him, even though they admitted [that] in the past, they weren't always as good of a friend to him as he was to them."

Also in attendance was Crowley, who learned for the first time the enormity of Elzemeyer's presence in the Ladue community. For years, Elzemeyer had rescheduled birthday parties or family events on account of a Ladue game, but Crowley never fathomed that many athletes counted on him to be there. She was in awe that her brother had spent so much of his life committed to a fraternity of athletes she had never met.

"I think most people hope to affect people," Crowley said. "We all want to leave a legacy. We all want to make a difference in the world. And he did make a difference to all the students in the school — he touched so many lives. Everybody wants to do that; we strive to do that. I just wish I knew about it before he died."

While Ladue sports will have to continue without Elzemeyer's presence, many athletes feel that he fundamentally changed the way their teams care for each other. Stern does not see his impact leaving the Ladue community any time soon.

"Bob's legacy is well deserved and should be long lasting," Stern said. "He made Ladue sports teams like family. He devoted his life to this school and the people it holds. Bob's legacy is unconditional love and passion for the students and staff of this school, as well as the athletics happening outside of it." □

