

Football Family lifts Buc Senior Poole

By Matt Tjapkes

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When Deacon Poole first started playing football in seventh grade, he wasn't sure the sport was for him. In fact, he didn't attend practice the first few days.

"I wasn't sure if I wanted to play football or not," the Buccaneer senior lineman confessed. "But thank the Lord I did, because it was the best decision I ever made."

Needless to say, Poole is cherishing his final days as a member of the Buccaneer football team.

"This Buccaneer program is a family," Poole said. "Everyone here is there for each other 24/7 whenever you need to talk to them – the coaches, the players, the managers. It's a really deep connection that everyone feels."

Buccaneer coach Jason Tester has emphasized the family atmosphere with his football squad this season.

"We talk about that constantly because that's how we feel," Tester said. "Being a family is at the heart of our program. That's not for show or something to put on a t-shirt, it's what we believe in."

That family atmosphere has become even more important to Poole, as his mother, Tammy Klaassen, was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. Tester and his team have rallied around Poole and his family, with the new Buccaneer coach taking time to share how cancer has touched his life.

"It felt really good to know that, even a new coach who just came to the program who I haven't known very long, could care so much for his players," Poole said. "It was so comforting to know that."

"That really touched me," Klaassen added. "Being a brand new coach taking over the varsity program, I was floored that at that time he even knew who my son was. It meant a lot, to both of us. The coaches' involvement doesn't stop there. Sometimes it's as simple as a hug for me or slap on Deacon's back. Just the reassuring gestures that they understand there is more to life than football and although winning on the field is great, there are other battles to be won."

Soon after the diagnosis, officials from Bucs Pride stepped in to show their support as well.

"Sharon Yonker was already at my doorstep even before my first chemo treatment with a basket of treats from Bucs Pride: a water bottle, Buccaneer blanket, books, support information, a journal, flashlight, Dune Dollars/gift certificates, etc. All items that are very helpful for anyone with cancer going through chemotherapy," Klaassen said.

After graduation, Poole hopes to attend a local community college and then move on to a college with a strong engineering program. By staying close by for a year or two, Poole can also help his mom and his two siblings, Molly and Lance, as Tammy continues her battle against Invasive Ductal Breast Cancer. Klaassen said despite being an aggressive cancer, her prognosis is good.

"I'm grateful that it was detected early enough that it did not have time to spread very far," she said. "Had much more time passed, at the rate the mass was growing, my prognosis might not be so optimistic. It's treatable and a successful recovery is not only possible, it's quite probable. I'm grateful for my faith, my strength, my support system of family and friends. The sum of all makes this journey much more tolerable than I had ever imagined it could be."

Tonight, Poole and his fellow seniors step on the field for the final time. As the community observes Bucs Pride night, the game will have extra importance for Poole, Klaassen and their whole family.

"It's really a nice coincidence that my final (game) in my senior year gets to be the purple game and I get to play for my mom," Poole said. "It's going to be a really emotional game. I've seen the effects of Bucs Pride. It's a wonderful program and I'm so happy we have something like that in this city."

"Having him wear my name on his jersey and knowing he's on my team is all I need to know that we're going to win this battle together," Klaassen concluded. "Not only is my name in his back, I know he's always got my back, and there's no one else I'd rather have in my corner."