

Pass It On®...

The Brotherhood in Sports Goes Beyond the Field. *How a men's rugby team supported one of their own.*

Rugby, they say, is a gentleman's game played by hooligans. The game itself is based on warfare, with one side controlling territory and fighting for more.

At first glance, rugby appears to be an orchestrated bash of bodies. But take a closer look and you will see that there is a front line, or line of scrimmage. You'll watch players with the ball try to advance with no blockers in front of them, but lots of support behind them. There are lots of strategies and even set plays, but the essence of the game is that one player moves the ball as far as he can until he is stopped; at that point, his teammates support him while another takes up the ball and pushes forward.

It is a game that requires complete trust in the players behind you. Players love the game because of the camaraderie. Someone always has your back.

In the junior leagues, the phrase you'll hear most often shouted by coaches is: "Go with him!" Players must learn to follow and support a teammate at all times and all costs. When a player is down, their teammates form a ruck, or a kind of huddle, over them to protect them and the mission of moving forward. Protecting a mate in this way often means an opposing player is going to run into you at full bore to try and disrupt the ruck. It's a price you pay for your teammates.

It's no wonder that rugby players form a strong bond among themselves. They are almost always in a supporting role. So it's no surprise that, 15 years after playing together in college, a team remains close as siblings. And so it was for Stan's team.

Stan was a tall, fit, handsome young man who succeeded in business right after college. He has a young family, and he has cancer. But he also has his brothers from the team. When he was hospitalized during the pandemic, none of his team brothers was allowed to visit the hospital. So every day, they donned their old jerseys and stood atop

the parking garage, where Stan could see them through his window.

Even with a breathing tube in his mouth, Stan's wife says, he smiled. The next week, tears formed in his eyes. Stan was getting weaker. The lads from his team showed up every day, arms clasped in solidarity. They were standing that way on a rainy day when Stan passed.

"It meant everything to me," his wife says. "To see the support day after day. My kids see those young men as heroes. His rugby brothers take turns calling them to see how they are doing."

Life is just shorter for some people than others. But we can all make it richer, more meaningful, by "going with them" through difficult times.

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