Leukemia Hits Tech Assistant

Seward Is Dealt Unfair Hand

By BILL BRILL
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In less than two weeks, Steve Seward will celebrate his 25th birthday.

By then, Seward hopes to be walking again. He also hopes his lengthy stay in Winston-Salem Baptist Hospital will be nearing an end.

Until last winter, Seward had been a picture of health. He was a graduate assistant in the Virginia Tech basketball program and was on the road in North Carolina recruiting.

His side started to hurt. He called back to the Tech basketball office to mention the problem. Seward was on the bench for the season opener with VMI, but according to Tech assistant Sonny Smith, "Steve was really sick."

A couple of days later, Tech assistant Jim Hallihan drove Steve to his home in Johnson City, Tenn. Shortly after that, Seward came to Winston-Salem.

The diagnosis was shocking. Steve Seward, graduate of William & Mary, son of former Duke basketball great John (Bubba) Seward, was suffering from acute leukemia.

Except for a couple of occasions when he has been permitted to leave the hospital, Seward has been in Room 917. He has undergone numerous treatments, including radiation, and he has suffered physically.

He has lost his hair and a lot of weight. For a while, he had trouble talking. But he remains dauntless, convinced that he is on the road to recovery.

"I'm feeling better," Seward said by phone Wednesday. "I feel like I'll be out of here in two or some weeks."

The latest treatment for the disease has left Seward particularly uncomfortable. "Right now I can't walk," he said. "I get around on a walker. There have been a few minor complications that have made life uncomfortable, but the main things are fine."

Although most of the last 17 weeks have been spent in the hospital, Seward said it had not been too bad "until this last treatment. It's tough to sit around in the hospital like I have the last four weeks."

But Seward is encouraged. His doctors are encouraged. "They caught it early," he said. "They are trying to set up a maintenance program for me that will last three or four years. I'd be able to take my medicine at home and just have to come back to the hospital for periodic checkups."

I get my strength back, I want to come back to Tech," he said.

After graduation from William & Mary in 1973, Steve stayed on a year as a graduate assistant. "Then I got the job at Tech. I'm getting my masters is education in guidance and counseling. But I want to be a coach. I really enjoyed it last fall out recruiting."

When Seward first went in the hospital, he maintained contact with his prospects. "I talked to them on the phone and I wrote letters. I told them I was sick, but not for them to forget us."

Besides North Carolina, Seward also scouted in New York and New Jersey. "We didn't get any of those fellows, but it was close," said Seward.

"We were a man short and we couldn't keep up with those prospects," said DeVo, "but I honestly feel if we had Steve all year that we would have signed a couple of them. He really made a hit with them."

Seward said that because it had gotten "pretty discouraging" recently just sitting around, he was especially pleased about the signing of Ashford.

All of the Tech coaches are particularly close to Seward. Smith knew him at William & Mary, where Smith was an assistant coach at the time.

Seward first went to Vanderbilt, "but when he found out he wouldn't start, he transferred to William & Mary," said Smith. Seward was just one of four transfers to W&M that year. Seward started all his junior year and some of the time during his senior campaign, when the Tribe went with a youth movement. Still, Seward was captain of the team that season.

After the graduate year at W&M, Seward felt he had gotten his break when "I got the job at Tech."

But then came the really bad break. Acute leukemia. What was Seward's reaction after the diagnosis? "I just wanted to know what could be done," he said.

He has approached the illness realistically. He has done what the doctors have asked. And he has never given up hope.

"I'm looking forward to getting out of here and back into coaching," Steve said.

"So are we," said DeVo. "His job is here waiting for him."

If Steve Seward has his way, it will not be a long wait. But whatever the time element, Seward plans to come back.

All the way back.