

BOND OF A LIFETIME

CY RIDGE RAMS COACH MATTHEW BEELER DONATED PART OF HIS LIVER WITHOUT HESITATION TO FELLOW COACH JOHN MCWILLIAMS

Written by Leigh Ann Mitchell | Photography by Candace Cook

When John McWilliams found himself in need of a life-saving procedure, Matthew Beeler took the chance to help. Through this selfless act, McWilliams is able to live a healthier and happier life.

THE COACHES

John McWilliams is a football coach and teacher with 40 years' experience. He also has a condition known as familial transthyretin amyloidosis. This genetic disease of the liver causes an abnormal amount of amyloid proteins to build up on the organs of the body. It began to affect McWilliams' heart function and the only option was a liver transplant. As luck would have it, that donor would be his fellow coach and friend, Matthew Beeler. "I was on a waiting list that was probably going to take about two years before I had enough points to qualify to get a liver. That's where Matt came in," says McWilliams.

When Beeler heard about McWilliams' situation, he reached out and was determined to help. "I donated 63% of my liver. The decision to donate was easy. I spoke with my wife the night after John told us he needed a new liver," Beeler recalls.

MAKING THE MATCH

Matching living organ donors with recipients calls for a series of tests and qualifications. Beeler went through the initial application process to be a living donor, which involved testing his blood to see if it was a match to McWilliams'.

The very next month Beeler flew to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota to make sure the anatomy of his liver was able to be cut through. After a week, Beeler received news that he could proceed with the surgery.

A LIFE-CHANGING PROCEDURE

On March 26, 2015, both Beeler and McWilliams entered the operating room for the transplant procedure. Beeler's surgery lasted between two to three hours, while the removal of McWilliams' old liver and the receiving of his new one lasted around four.

After the surgery, Beeler was in ICU for three days, then another three days in a private room before being released. When he returned home, he developed a staph infection which inhibited his recovery some, but he overcame it quickly.

McWilliams' recuperation was very different and involved a few setbacks. "I got an infection and was on some very strong antibiotics for 10 days," he recalls. "I also had a little rejection and they put me on some very strong steroids to stop it." McWilliams was in the hospital for 16 days and had a few problems with his heart, but he soon healed and continued the mending process.

GREAT SUPPORT TEAM

McWilliams had a huge support system throughout the surgery and healing process. "I can't say enough about my wife Victoria and my sister Nona for all the care and time they have put in with me," McWilliams smiles.

Beeler's greatest encouragement came from his wife and family. "I can't thank my wife enough," smiles Beeler. "She put her career on hold for me to do this. We even put our honeymoon on hold because two months after the wedding I had the surgery." Support was also amplified from the entire Cy Ridge High School family. "I am amazingly blessed to have all these people in my life," says Beeler.

John McWilliams received a life-saving liver donation from fellow Cy Ridge coach Matthew Beeler



ADVICE FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

For those who wish to become an organ donor, Beeler says “Ask questions and don’t be afraid to reach out for help.” There is an immense need for organs and being a donor not only changes the life of the recipient, it changes the lives of everyone around them. “There is a high demand for organ donations. The number is unbelievable,” McWilliams explains. For those on the waiting list for organ donations, McWilliams says to be patient, pray, and keep faith.

BEYOND THE O.R.

“I’m very thankful to have been able to do what I have done,” smiles Beeler. “There was actually a domino recipient in this story. John’s liver was able to be donated to someone else and saved their life.”

For Beeler, it is still an amazing feeling to think of all that he went through to help a friend in need. “Part of the reason why I did what I did was to inspire people,” he explains. “To still be reaching people months after is amazing and I am always willing to help, answer questions, and share my story.” CFM

ORGAN DONATION FACTS

- *More than 120,000 people are on the waiting list for a transplant*
- *Every 10 minutes a new person is added to the waiting list*
- *22 people die every day waiting for an organ transplant*
- *One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation and countless others through tissue donation*

REGISTER TO DONATE

- *Go to donatelifetexas.org to register*
- *Register when you obtain/renew your driver’s license or ID*
- *Register when you renew your vehicle registration*