



May 18, 2007

Athletic Directors, Coaches and Friends,

As we anticipate the approach of another football season, I want to bring to your attention, some of your colleagues, have had the unfortunate experience of witnessing one of their football players suffer a spinal cord injury.

This past year was an extremely difficult year as several high school athletes were added to our Gridiron Heroes Family. Four (4) young men suffered a spinal cord injury playing the sport they loved and trained for throughout their young lives.

A total of 12 players have been injured since the creation of the Gridiron Heroes Spinal Cord Injury Foundation and we now serve 14 athletes in total.

When we started the Gridiron Heroes Organization in 2003, it began with the simple idea of being able to provide comfort, information, inspiration, and most of all HOPE.

Unfortunately and inevitably, each year, there are young men who suffer a catastrophic spinal cord injury playing the great sport of Football. The spinal cord injury causes paralysis and a total life change for the injured athlete and his entire family. These young athletes and their families will pay a tremendous cost! This type of injury affects the athlete in every area of their life including their physical, emotional, and financial well-being.

Much more support and assistance is needed to be able to help our injured athletes and their families. When a football player suffers this life changing injury it impacts everyone involved with his life as parents and other family members have to become caregivers 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

It's imperative for the Gridiron Heroes Foundation to get to the point where we can react with immediate assistance to the injured player and his family. From providing a wheelchair accessible van, adding a wheelchair accessible restroom, to building ramps, to constructing or remodeling a home, or to help secure medical durable goods and supplies, to providing an educational fund allowing these athletes to continue with their education after high school, these football players and families need our help! We cannot do this with out your involvement.

Unfortunately, due to our limited financial resources, we're often unable to provide the assistance these families desperately need at the exact time of their need. We must find a way to do more for these families!

Some financial aid and short-term help is available to those who play in a high profile Football game, however it's not always the case for the young athletes who were injured in a JV, Freshman, or Jr. High game. It's also not the case for those living in a rural area. Sadly, we're playing catch-up in trying to help all of our injured athletes.

In the last two years, Gridiron Heroes has purchased \$100.00 gift cards that are sent out every month to each of our injured athletes to utilize as needed.

In 2006, we continued with the gift cards and donated two new wheelchair accessible vans to two of our athletes, one injured in 1999 and another injured in 2003. I can't begin to share with you the difference this can make on the quality of life for these injured young men. These two young athletes with promising lives ahead of them would have been forgotten had it not been for our Gridiron Heroes Spinal Cord Injury Foundation.

Our message is simple. We're not out to deter anyone from playing football. We still love the game! However, we must understand a spinal cord injury can occur and has occurred each year since our inception. Knowing this information, we must have more involvement from the football community in order to help those who suffer from this life altering injury.

There has never been a sustained "Advocate" beyond the initial few months or maybe a year of the injury for our catastrophically injured athlete. This is something we are changing. Support for these athletes must endure even past high school. This is a long-term injury with long-term health problems and long-term financial obligations. As big as Football is across this great nation, we should have some type of program in place to help our catastrophically injured student athlete.

Gridiron Heroes is now notified within hours of an injury. We are receiving calls prior to the Texas High School Coaches Association (THSCA) and the University Interscholastic League (UIL). We now let them know when an injury has occurred. Though we have earned and received endorsement of the THSCA and the UIL we do not receive any financial help from either organization.

We are thankful to the coaches, schools and booster clubs who have sent in their donations or have participated in any of our events.

Recently we have had some concerns raised as to whether or not a Coach should become involved in helping to raise funds and awareness for their injured athletes. In fact, we have received calls from Athletic Directors and Coaches who want to help their injured football players but have been advised by the School District's Attorney to not get directly involved with any fundraising effort. Apparently, some Coaches have been advised that agreeing to help raise funds could be misconstrued as accepting fault thus opening the School and possibly the Coach to liability suits.

Because of this issue, it's even more important to have our Gridiron Heroes Foundation become involved in helping these injured athletes from the start. At the very least, our involvement can help take away the question of liability.

In many of our speaking engagements many people question the funds spent on the elaborate state of the art stadiums being built across our great state of Texas so our young athletes can play the game of Football. Many ask about revenue the game of football produces across the state. Shouldn't some of these funds be dedicated to benefit the catastrophically injured athletes who dedicated their time, energy, and talents to the sport they love?

In a previous conversation, and in a letter written to the UIL, in March 2007, I referenced news articles mentioning increasing the ticket cost to a game to help pay for new mandated steroid testing. I offer a suggestion. I propose that \$0.25 from every ticket sold go directly to the Gridiron Heroes Organization in order to help these catastrophically injured athletes. These funds can be set aside to assist the injured player by making key purchases for medical, transportation equipment and educational needs.

For the most part our athletes who have suffered a spinal cord injury are being overlooked and forgotten by the many fans who once cheered them on and by those who have earned revenue from the game itself.

Sadly, we struggle to raise a \$100,000.00 every year! More discouraging is the fact that when a racehorse suffered a broken leg this past year, those in the racing community raised \$1.4 million to help pay for the medical cost and care of this fine animal.

I hope and pray we as a football community can get to the point where we value the life and well being of our injured human athletes as much or more than the people in the horse racing community valued a horse.

It is time to get every school and school district involved. Please don't wait; the next athlete might be from your team or school district.

We have several programs for you to get involved in. Coaches, stop by our booth at the San Angelo Clinic or at the THSCA Convention. Visit our website www.gridironheroes.org for other programs.

You! Can help improve the quality of life for these young athletes.

Respectfully,

Eddie Canales
Founder / Director
Gridiron Heroes Spinal Cord Injury Foundation
210-849-9250
www.gridironheroes.org

