

Two point scored by ECA player battling brain cancer transcended game

Don't tell me that two points in a blowout victory are insignificant. I won't believe it, especially when a father sits at a scorer's table with tears rolling over his cheeks because of those two points. Last March, Ezekiel Wetlesen had emergency surgery to remove a walnut-sized cancerous tumor from his brain. So when he put two points on the board for Evangelical Christian Academy in a late January victory the gymnasium erupted.

Some people yelled. Some clapped and laughed out loud. Others smiled. And, like the father at the scorer's table, some cried. "It was a great feeling," Eagles senior guard Justin Beers said. "The crowd was just so loud when he scored. It was amazing." Fellow senior guard Josh Morin was on the bench when Wetlesen scored his first points of the season. Morin, like his teammates, stood up, all of them cheering. "I looked at the scorer's table," Morin said. "Mr. Wetlesen was doing the scorebook, and he started crying."

Ezekiel Wetlesen doesn't want to be seen as special. That's too bad, because he is. Wetlesen doesn't want to be anything more than another member of the team. That's too bad, too. Wetlesen stands 6-foot-4. His head is shaven on one part and splotches of wispy hair spring from another: Yet, he still manages to look unassuming. Wetlesen tolerates chemotherapy treatments, but nevertheless finds the energy to practice and play basketball. Patients must be clear of the cancerous cells for five years before being deemed cured.

Wetlesen is trying, doing everything he can to lead the life a normal high school senior:

"For the most part, I can tell the story of what happened," Wetlesen said in a staccato, one syllable at a time style. After a lengthy pause, he finished. "... in how I can think, in how I can say it, in broken sentences."

Wetlesen pauses a lot these days. He thinks a lot more, too, not because he has to. The cancer did that to him. It robbed him of his short-term memory. It robbed him of some of his long-term memory, too. Wetlesen shook his head and shrugged his shoulders when asked what he remembered about his shot against Calhan.

On March 28, Wetlesen woke from a nap. He was sick to his stomach and had blurred vision. Both his head and back ached, and his speech was slurred. His mom, Eloise, rushed him to the hospital where doctors found a bleeding tumor near his left temple. Three days and many tests later, Wetlesen had a seizure and required emergency surgery.

Wetlesen is David's and Eloise's third oldest child. Recently, David sat in a room across the hall from where his son was practicing. David is an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel and the soldier in him came out. He tried to keep his body upright and strong as he recalled his son's experiences. The father in David, however, was unmistakable as his voice started to quiver and he forcefully squeezed his hands.

"You're taken totally by surprise," David said before explaining the total confidence he had in the doctors. "But, you know, you have got to make decisions and say, 'Do the tests. Do the operation.'" You're just hoping you get him through that and see what the prognosis is. "You make life as normal as possible for him and give hope."

Ironically, that's what Ezekiel is doing. Just by practicing and playing, he's giving other hope and inspiration. Ezekiel's cancer was certain death 10 years ago. But, because of advancements in research, Ezekiel could eventually land his dream job – a high school math teacher. For now, Ezekiel will tolerate many more months of chemotherapy – his MRIs have been clear for nine months. Fifty-one clear months to go.

More importantly, Ezekiel will continue to practice as much as he can. He'll continue to play as much as he can. He'll inspire his teammates as much as he said they inspire him.

He'll continue proving the significance of two points.

Columnist Milo F. Bryant