

Brian Dunn
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Dear LaViola's,

I wanted to drop you a note to express my deepest sympathies to your entire family. I can only imagine what a difficult time this must be and my heartfelt prayers go out to you. The service and viewing were such beautiful tributes to Mike and your family. The number of people that Mike touched in his short life is overwhelming.

With that in mind, I really wanted to let you know how much Mike meant to our football team, his coaches, and to me individually. Mike is the type of young man that teams are built on. A person that can be the foundation of success. Mike made me realize as a coach that you have to look deeper into a person to see all their qualities in order to judge their potential. Although he was not the biggest or fastest, Mike worked himself into being a very big part of a very good team. I will never forget his work ethic between his junior and senior season where he willed himself onto the field. He worked so hard and once he got his opportunity, he excelled. I was so proud of him.

More importantly, Mike was one of the few players that I have coached that taught me so much. I don't know if you are aware, but he actually taught me how to ride a motorcycle. The summer heading into his junior year, he rode his dirt bike to practice between double sessions. When I saw this, I gave him a really hard time about it. Mike took it well as he usually did. I also decided I would seize the opportunity to ride his bike. I took the dirt bike from Mike, started it up and proceeded to wipe out right in the school parking lot. Mike came over, didn't laugh, as he should have, and gave me a lesson on how to ride. Within minutes I was tooling all over the school parking lot until an officer pulled in the lot and pulled me over. The cop gave me a good tongue lashing and began to take out his ticket book. Mike walked over calmly and took all the blame and responsibility. He told the cop it was his bike and that I confiscated it to help him. The cop said... "LaViola, how many times have we told you to stay off the streets? Now walk that thing home." We had a good laugh about this later, but I won't forget how calm and cool Mike was. I really learned a lot about him at that time.

I also need to share with you something Mike said to me right after he was diagnosed. He said, "Coach, I am SO LUCKY, to have gotten through the season before having this happen." I could not believe this young kid was talking about how lucky he was after learning he had cancer. I was so struck by how tough he was. I know how important it was for him to finish his season and be able to play with his friends.

Mike made us all laugh so much and taught us all to really believe in the size of a kids heart. I know all of our coaches feel the same way. With your consent, we would like to establish an annual award given to a senior football player at Old Tappan in Mike's memory. I believe it would be fitting if the award was given to the player that best exemplified the qualities of Michael LaViola...courage, poise, work ethic, and team play. The Blue and Gold Football Camp and Old Tappan Coaches would like to sponsor the award each year with a plaque and a monetary award in the range of \$250.

Again, this would be only with your consent and with any conditions or changes that you would like to make. Please know how much Mike meant to all of us here at the school. The memories lessons he gave me as a coach and a person are ones that I will carry forever. If there is anything I can do for you, please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'BD', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brian Dunn