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LIFT FOR LIFE A SUCCESS YET AGAIN

By Jeff Rice

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UNIVERSITY PARK -- Kidney cancer doesn't respond to most treatments, including chemotherapy. It has no detectable symptoms. And it is rarely discussed, or as Scott Shirley put it, "It doesn't have the celebrity appeal."

Not yet.

Shirley and a team of devoted Penn State students and football players put on the third annual Lift For Life weightlifting fundraiser Friday in Holuba Hall. Twenty-two four-man teams of Nittany Lions lifted, grunted and sweated to raise money and awareness for the Kidney Cancer Association.

The "We Are Legend" team of Paul Posluszny, Jim Shaw, Jim Kanuch and Deon Butler won Friday's competition, and proceeds totaled more than \$30,000, bringing Lift For Life's three-year total over \$80,000.

As Lift For Life uses the draw of Penn State football to reach a larger audience and gains more national attention, more Nittany Lion fans are learning about a disease that comprises just 2-3 percent of kidney cases in the United States but causes 1,800 deaths each year.

"We've had more people calling the association -- from State College in particular -- who have said, 'I've just been diagnosed with kidney cancer,'" said Paula Bowen, the KCA board chair and an 11-year survivor of advanced kidney cancer. "Just the publicity from this event alone has caused people to get in touch with us."

Those who work tirelessly year-round to spur the growth of the event do so for the cause, but in doing so receive additional benefits, Shirley said.

College football players live on strict schedules that allow little time for things other than practice, study and sleep. The majority of them stay on campus to repeat the routine during the summer, while many of their classmates are taking internships.

"We're developing it into an organization of where we can get these real-world experiences," said Shirley, a walk-on from Enola who played wide receiver from 2000-03. "There's really nothing that football players study that's not applicable to some function of Lift For Life."

"Everyone comes from different backgrounds, everyone comes from different academic areas," said Darien Hardy, a junior cornerback who lost his father, Daryal, to kidney cancer last September. "To come together as a team for Lift For Life, or any event to benefit something of this nature, is just incredible."

Their efforts are gathering notice, and not only at the KCA. Shirley and fellow event co-founders Dave Costlow and Damone Jones spoke at a National Consortium of Academics and Sports conference in February and have been contacted by members of several universities who are interested in similar fund-raisers.

Shirley and Costlow also attended a KCA patient conference last July, where they learned more about the limited number of treatments and limited funds allocated toward kidney cancer.

"You could talk to five different kidney cancer patients," Bowen said, "and they'd have five different treatments."

The only treatment approved by the Food and Drug Administration is interleukin-2 (IL-2), an immune stimulator that increases T-cell counts but is brutal on patients, as both Bowen and Shirley's father, Don, can attest. And even IL-2 has only a 10-15 percent response rate.

It was in the hope for more treatments, for more effective treatments, and for more awareness of the disease and those who suffer from it that Lift For Life was born.

"Our event helps make kidney cancer newsworthy," Shirley said, "and in turn we can educate people on the dire situation that kidney cancer patients are in and hopefully that will turn around and change the situation a little bit to where it's not a numbers game."