

W & Southwick WESTFIELD PLUS

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Baseball game aids cancer battle

By AMANDA BRUNO

WESTFIELD – Everyone knows at least one person in their life who has been diagnosed or stricken with cancer. Some are lucky enough to seek treatment and be OK, but others end up losing the battle because it was far too late.

Kenny "Lumberjack" Toporowski, who plays for the Westfield Wheelmen, a Vintage Base Ball team was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme stage 4 brain cancer back in February and wasn't looking good at all.

After emergency surgery and multiple visits to the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Toporowski is back playing in games with his fellow teammates.

"I'm 110 percent, I'll tell you.

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Photo by JANUARY RUSSELL

Kenny "Lumberjack" Toporowski being hugged by Wally The Green Monster, as teammates, from left, Nick "The Bull" Dumont Kevin "Rusty" Russell, and Andre "Andale!" Conde look on during the Lumberjack Vintage Baseball Classic.

Baseball: Benefit fights cancer

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Ever since my five months from April on I feel 110 percent better," said Toporowski. "Before that, I felt like I wanted to die, I'll be honest. Other than that, I'm going to live day by day and see what it brings."

On Aug. 8 the Wheelmen hosted the Lumberjack Classic held at Bullsens Field in honor of their teammate. The benefit exceeded expectations and all the proceeds went directly to Toporowski and his family to cover treatments and hospital bills.

"As a player, I am overwhelmed. To come here and to see all of these people, it's amazing," said Toporowski. "Just to see how many people support my benefit, I'm just lost for words."

The Wheelmen played the Latin Stars where its coach, Ray Mota is a two-time cancer survivor. Mota was stricken with astrocytoma, a form of brain cancer, and lymphoma later on, but is happily living cancer free.

"I got the call from Dan Genovese and got my guys to fly in from everywhere just to be here. No questions asked," said Mota.

Boston Red Sox public address announcer Carl Beane was the master of ceremonies, and he brought along Wally the Green Monster who entertained the crowd throughout the game. At one point Wally filled in as the third-base coach and even pinch hit in the game. Sadly, he grounded out to the shortstop, but made a good hustle to first base.

"There are people in my life that either have been claimed by cancer or have survived, so anything that has to do with doing something for people dealing with cancer I will do anything I can," said Beane. "It's very important, it needs to be eradicated and if this can sort of make a little path, I'm all for it."

Spectators had a great time for a great cause. Prior to the game there was a home run derby contest split into two di-

visions, the adult and 12 and under.

Latin Stars player Kenny "No No" Noe won the adult division and Brandon Bennett was crowned 12 and under champion. Both took home custom handmade wooden baseball bats.

As an incentive for the concession stands and gift shop, for every \$2 spent, everyone received custom Westfield Wheelmen baseball cards to collect and trade with friends. Throughout the game, children received autographs of their favorite players on the cards.

"Each of us continue to get compliments about what we achieved, how it was handled and the attention to detail in all areas of the event," said Dan "Gunner" Genovese, captain and founder of the Wheelmen. "Of course none of this would have been possible without the generous sponsors, wonderful vendors and of course all the fans and friends of the Lumberjack."