

Blind Cheerleader Inspires

Kennedy Hansen, a 16-year-old sophomore from Utah, is known as, The Angel of Fairmont High. Just last summer, the teenager was diagnosed with a rare terminal genetic disorder, juvenile Batten disease, which has taken her sight and deteriorated her brain. "She's losing her mobility, her ability to walk, her ability to talk, her ability to reason. She's at about a pre-school level and she has a little less than a year to live." her father said. Nevertheless, her condition did not stop Kennedy from attaining her lifelong goal of becoming a cheerleader.



It all started when Kennedy's father took her down to the local sports field so she could listen to the cheerleaders performing at a game being played there. While there, Mr. Hansen told the squad that his daughter had always dreamed of being a cheerleader. When they arrived home her father wrote in his journal that he wished Kennedy could be on the squad but he was aware that she never would be. A few days later, much to his surprise the cheer coach and squad asked Kennedy to join the team. They had found out more about Kennedy's dream and Batten disease, and wanted to help.

"For me as a dad, it was a prayer answered. I would have been completely content with one game, but the experience was with coach Jill Schofield who does not build cheerleaders, she builds young women."

On the squad, Kennedy lifts the spirits of not only the crowds, but also inspires all of her fellow cheerleaders. "She doesn't see her challenges as challenges," coach Schofield said.

Kennedy's mother said that in spite of her daughter's personality changing as her disease advances, she seems to return to her old self when she's with the squad. "There's something magical that happens when she gets with the girls. She's energetic and vibrant and just comes alive. She comes alive again. She's having so much fun."

All of her teammates are inspired by Kennedy. "She makes the best out of everything. So it just makes me want to be a better person." said a fellow cheerleader. Another shared, "She just kind of humbled me because I learned not to take advantage of the skills that I have. We love Kennedy and wouldn't trade anything for this experience. She's had such an effect on our team."

"Kennedy has a remarkable spirit but a fading body and it's been fun to see these cheerleaders grow and recognize that," said Kennedy's father.

Recently, Fairmont High team played its last home game. Kennedy's parents are grateful for the time that she had as a High School cheerleader. Her mother added "Seeing her with those cheerleaders makes you feel like she's just one of the girls. She gets to finally experience everything that a normal teenager would."