UMass football squad recruits for bone marrow donor registration

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Published: Wednesday, March 11, 2009
Updated: Thursday, March 12, 2009

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Players from the University of Massachusetts football team were on the offensive yesterday afternoon, as they competed to recruit people walking through the Campus Center to participate in a bone marrow donor registration drive.

Now in its second year, the annual event seeks anyone willing to swab their cheek and fill out some paper work – a process which takes several minutes – to be entered into the National Marrow Donor Program Registry database of potential matches for bone marrow transplants.

By the time of the drive's conclusion at 2 p.m., the team had registered 240 people, up from around 150 a year ago, said football team video coordinator Bill Sisler.

"People have been fantastic," said Kevin Morris, who was promoted from offensive coordinator to be the team's head coach in January. "We're so thankful to see the UMass community so excited about what we're doing here."

Similar drives are being held by the other 11 schools in the football team's conference, the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA), which holds a competition to see which team can register the most people.

Morris added extra incentive for his players by dividing them up to see which group could sign up the most people. The groups earned points for each registrant, which go towards part of a larger team-wide competition for a reward to be determined at the end of spring.

Last year's campaign was held at McGuirk Stadium on May 3, the day of the team's Spring Game, but the registration was mainly limited to players, coaches and their friends and family, Sisler said.

Sophomore Octavious Hawkins, one of five quarterbacks in the running to be a starter, volunteered to demonstrate for students how to use the cotton swab kits.

Each kit contains four sterilized swabs, which are used to rub against the four corners of the inner cheek – a process much simpler than it was two years ago, when registrants had to give a vial of blood. The swabs are then sealed and sent away to be tested for possible matches. If a match is found, the person tested is contacted through the form they filled out with the testing kit.

"We are trying to get way more people than any other team so we can help people out," said Hawkins, a communications major.

He said Morris came up with the idea for the team's internal competition to boost the players' motivation.

"It brought out the competitiveness in all of us," Hawkins said. "Our new coach is all about helping people."

Men's lacrosse coach Greg Cannella, who graduated from the University in 1988, participated in the drive.

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“I’m here to support the football team and potentially help anyone, if need be,” he said.

Standing in the main concourse of the Campus Center, the football team also brought many students down the escalators to the basement room where the tests were administered.

“I was recruited by a large football player,” said senior Chris Mackay, majoring in Middle Eastern studies. “I’m trying to see what it’s all about and if I want to be in the registry.”

“I’m all for it,” said Smith Vocational [Northampton] senior Mykayla Parisa. “I’m just up for something different really.”

On any given day, more than 6,000 people search the NMDP Registry for a donor. These patients have leukemia, lymphoma and other life-threatening diseases that can be treated by a bone marrow or cord blood transplant.

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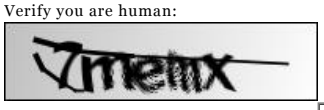

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