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Little Leaguers join cancer fight

Grieving mother got coaches' help

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Killian Owen loved baseball and he loved telling jokes.

His mother remembers one of his favorites.



ANDY SHARP / Staff
[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Grainne Owen wears a button with late son Killian's photo as she sits at her home with sons (from left clockwise) Garrett, Pierce and Finn. She got Coaches Curing Kids' Cancer going.



[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Killian Owen

"What do you call a cow without legs?" he liked to ask.

Then he would chuckle and answer, "Ground beef."

Killian thought that one was hilarious, Grainne Owen said. The 9-year-old repeated it oft nurses caring for him at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. Two years ago last resort, Clay and Grainne Owen took their son to Maryland to try a new drug to fight Killian's leukemia. It didn't work.

"He fought it to the end," his mother said. "He got frustrated, but always had a great sense of humor."

When Killian died 19 months ago, his parents and three brothers were swallowed by grief. The first anniversary of his death, Grainne Owen decided it was time to deal with her anger and his loss.

"I felt Killian tell me to get up and use that energy in a positive way — to help other children," Owen said. "I thought that maybe I could stop this from happening to other parents."

Raising money to fund the search for a cure for children's cancer became a full-time job. August, the east Cobb mother went back to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, where Killian had been treated for more than three years.




Diane Vaughan, senior development officer for the AFLAC Cancer Center at Children's, liked Owen's idea — raising money from youth sports teams. Vaughan, who lives in Marietta, has an 11-year-old son in sports programs, so this was something she could get involved in on a personal level.

Grainne Owen said she got the idea from her son Pierce's baseball coach. Before Killian's death, the coach donated his end-of-the-season gift from the families of his players to pediatric cancer research. His gift inspired Owen to start Coaches Curing Kids' Cancer.

She contacted soccer and baseball teams and asked them to donate money they collect from coaches' gifts to go toward research. During three months last fall, she raised close to \$50,000 — largely from east Cobb teams.

Vaughan thinks Coaches Curing Kids' Cancer has the potential to raise millions for research.

"Coaches don't want another gadget or something intangible," Vaughan said. "This is cancer that can spread like wildfire."

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Mike Evertsen, father of three sons in the Sandy Plains Baseball League, took it a step fu After meeting Grainne Owen, he asked the teams in the 8-and-under Pinto Division to ge involved by accepting smaller trophies.

COACHES CURING KIDS' CANCER

--**What:** An east Cobb mother's effort to raise money for pediatric cancer research.

--**How:** Funds are being gathered through youth sports leagues, including coaches donating end-of-the-year gifts and players cutting back on trophies and awards.

--**More information:**
www.coachescuringkidscancer.org

The teams agreed, collecting \$15 from players but spending less than \$3 apiece for awa pediatric oncologist chipped in, bringing the total raised to \$3,500.

"It was a real good lesson for the kids, and the parents loved the idea," Evertsen said. "T momentum is already gaining for the spring season."

That's good news for Owen, who wants the program to spread across the country.

She has had interest from a team in Texas and got a donation from her brother-in-law's League team in South Carolina.

Vaughan's two nephews in Colorado plan to get their youth sports teams involved.

The funds will be directed through CureSearch, a national childhood cancer foundation that works with more than 235 children's hospital and pediatric cancer centers.

Donations from Georgia teams will be sent to the cancer center at Children's Healthcare. Vaughan said all of the donations will b for pediatric cancer research.

"When you hear that your child has cancer, your life and your family's life is never the same again," Owen said.

Killian had completed about 30 months of chemotherapy when he relapsed. He was first diagnosed with cancer a month before t sixth birthday and went through years of painful treatment, including a bone marrow transplant from his twin brother, Garrett.

Grainne Owen remembers driving Killian home after he had a spinal tap. Killian wanted to go out and play baseball with his frier The only thing he ever wanted was to be a normal kid, his mother said.

"That's what Killian can teach other children — how lucky they are to be healthy," she said. "He understood the value of life and squeezed everything out of each day he had."

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