

HOW LIFE CAN CHANGE IN A MOMENT



John Cross

A genetic heart condition has forced Minnesota State's Jared Schwanz to give up, at least temporarily, his football career and do some coaching on the Mavericks' staff.

Broken hearted

Rare heart condition forces MSU's Schwanz to reassess football career

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — It's been an emotional game of Twister for Jared Schwanz, whose life has been filled with sports since he was old enough to grip a ball. A three-sport standout at St. James, Schwanz had continued his athletic success with the Minnesota State football program.

But he may never play another game of any kind again, and while he's dealing with that disappointment, he also realizes how blessed he is because his recently diagnosed heart condition usually isn't discovered until the autopsy.

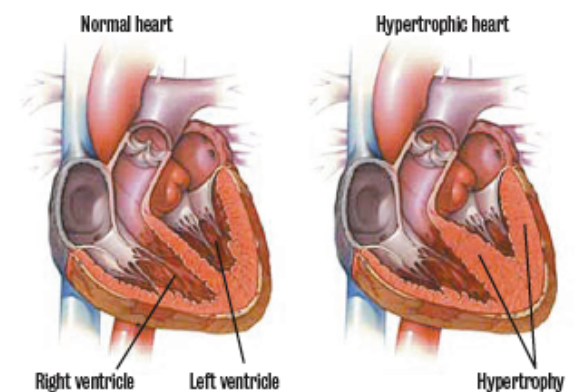
"I'm lucky enough to make it through high school playing football, wrestling and baseball," he said, standing on the Minnesota State practice field just a few feet away from his former teammates going through a pre-season workout.

"I've played two years of college football, I've been lucky enough to do all that without something happening to me. I still think about (not ever playing football again) every day, I want to be out there with the guys. To go from being someone who started the last game (in 2006) and to standing on the sidelines ... I was hoping to be a difference-maker, that makes everything a little tougher to take."

His voice cracks, there's a little moisture in his eyes. This one came out of nowhere and hit him like a rushing fullback.

It was just a couple of weeks ago that Schwanz was about to begin his third season of Minnesota State foot-

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy — HCM



Source: Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research

J. Mahmangar

ball. He had a good summer of working out and lifting weights. He passed a timed sprint test, making his goal in 80 turns. He had trimmed down to 300 pounds on his 6-foot frame.

But his grandmother, who has had past trouble with an irregular heartbeat, was hospitalized about a month ago. His uncle then needed medical attention for chest pains. The two cases led doctors to check for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetic condition in which the walls of the ventricles are unusually thick and cause the heart to function abnormally.

After HCM was discovered in the grandmother, all of her children had to be tested. If any of those siblings had the condition, their children needed to be checked. Schwanz's mother had HCM, leading to tests on her sons Jared and Justin.

Jared has HCM, and his football career is on hold.

Please see SCHWANZ, Page D4

SCHWANZ: Remains with team working with defensive tackles

Continued from Page D1

probably over. Justin, his younger brother, does not have HCM and can continue to compete on the Minnesota State wrestling team.

"The doctor told me there's a slim chance I could still come back," Schwanz said. "But I'm probably done."

About 1 in 500 people have some form of HCM, which can't be cured but can be managed through drugs or surgery. In young athletes, the condition shows up at times of heavy exertion, and when you hear about a college or prep player dying dur-

ing or shortly after practice, HCM could be the culprit.

"As an athlete, the last thing I thought about was heart problems," Schwanz said.

At Minnesota State, there is a required physical for incoming freshmen, but it takes a more specialized test to find HCM.

Coaching potential

Schwanz had always considered coaching as a career. Though he began as a law-enforcement major, he's now studying sports management, hoping to become a college or high-school football coach or

administrator some day. He had hoped that when his playing career ended, he'd join the Minnesota State staff or another as a graduate assistant while he pursued a master's degree.

But he didn't think his coaching career would begin this fall, working with the defensive tackles, who once were his teammates.

"It's funny, one door closes on my playing career, but another door opens for me to begin coaching," Schwanz said. "I've been in this system for two years, I know the defense. Instead of me doing something, now I'm

coaching it."

While it might be a tough transition from teammate to coach, Schwanz's personality seems to fit. He's always considered himself a good teammate, willing to help his fellow linemen who might have questions. He speaks from experience, and the players already trust him.

"There's no doubt, he's coaching material," Minnesota State coach Jeff Jamrog said. "At one of the first practices, I heard him out there barking 'If you can't do this, I'm coming back to take your place. He's done an outstanding job.'"

Jamrog said he's already decided that Schwanz will be involved on game day, either from the sidelines or the press box.

The future

Jamrog said that he'll soon sign the paperwork that designates Schwanz as a medical scholarship, meaning he will continue to receive aid for school but because of the potential career-ending injury, Schwanz won't count against the Mavericks' 36 scholarships. Schwanz would have to appeal to the NCAA to be reinstated if it were determined that he could

play football again some day.

He would also have to be cleared by Minnesota State doctors or trainers if he wanted to resume a playing career.

Schwanz has an appointment in Rochester Aug. 27 and 28 for more testing, and he's hoping to learn more about his future activity, not just football. He'd like to play town-team baseball back in St. James or slowpitch softball with his buddies.

"Maybe some day, there will be a drug or something that will give me a chance to come back (to football)," he said.