

# One Big Loss, One Grand Win

One Big Loss, One Grand Win



Submitted by [WGRZ Web Staff](#)

Thursday, July 19th, 2012, 1:04pm

Topics: [News](#)



GRAND ISLAND, N.Y. - The path to the Grand Island Vikings biggest win began as they stood by their teammate, Matt Lenz.

A player who in his most difficult days, helped lead a journey to the teams most unexpected comeback.

"It just felt like it was meant to be and that someone else was helping us," said Grand Island senior Drew Chorey.

The inspiration for the Grand Island baseball team this season came from Matt Lenz. He recently finished his junior season and loves baseball, the sport he grew up playing with his father Ken.

Matt's role with the Vikings was limited. On a deep and talented team, he rarely saw the field during games, but always there to practice and support his teammates.

"Everyone on this team loves him," said Vikings senior Dylan Kelly.

In April of 2011, Matt's father Ken was diagnosed with lung cancer. He was initially given just two months to live, but fought for more than a year.

"His dad was my first coach when I moved to the Island," said Chorey. "I would always be playing with Matt so his dad had a huge influence on me."

Ken Lenz coached many of the players on the Grand Island team as they grew up.

This season, the Vikings players paid tribute to their former coach by writing his initials, "K.L." on their game hats.

"Not only would he teach you baseball but he would teach you things about life and he would be just such an encouragement to everyone," said Chorey. "I think everyone that's met him would say that, he's just touched so many lives."

Ken's health began to fail as the Vikings began their 2012 playoff run. After each win, several players on the team would visit their former coach and present him with a game ball.

"They all rallied around and just helped me through it all," said Matt. "It means a lot that my dad meant a lot to the team because he coached all of them."

On May 31st the Vikings won the Section VI title to advance to the state playoffs.

The next morning Ken passed away.

Just four days later, the entire Grand Island baseball team attended Ken's funeral. The service was held just hours before Grand Island would play in the state quarterfinals. A game the Vikings had never won.

"It kind of inspired us that we weren't just playing to win baseball games, That we were playing for Coach Lenz and his family," said Chorey.

In the quarterfinal game, Grand Island battled Honeoye Falls-Lima. The game went to extra innings tied at three, but the Vikings fell behind by three runs in the top of the 10th inning.

In the bottom of the inning the Vikings were able to get a runner over to third base, but they had already recorded two outs.

Grand Island was just one out away from their season coming to an end.

"I'm not going to lie, we were down," said Kelly.

His teammate Chorey had a similar feeling, "I was on the edge of tears, I didn't want it to end."

It was at this moment that Grand Island head coach Dean Santorio turned to his bench.

"I wasn't thinking about winning the game, at that point I didn't care that much," said Santorio. "I wanted to win of course, but I wasn't thinking about that."

Santorio signaled for Matt to enter the game as the pinch runner at third base.

"He just kind of pointed at me and I pointed at myself because I really didn't think he was going to pinch run me," said Matt.

As Matt took the field, there was an unexpected delay in the game as the visiting coaches tended to an injured player. The pause gave the Grand Island community an opportunity to honor Matt.

"We probably had 500 fans there and they all stood in ovation. What was great and I don't know if it was just meant to happen, but there was about a three to four minutes standing ovation because this other kid was being tended to and it gave everyone a chance to honor him and it was emotional," said Santorio.

"The atmosphere just changed just felt like my dad was right there and he was going to help us win the game," said Matt

The game would change, on the very next pitch a base hit brought Matt home.

"It was just awesome, when he came in, it was a dream come true for him and his family," said his teammate Kelly.

Lenz was met at home plate by all off his teammates.

"Guys were just saying, that was for your dad, this was all for your dad," said Chorey.

"When Matt scored, I'm thinking great we end our season 6-4 he scored the last run of the game my kids all ran out of the dugout. I got 22 other kids on this team, and every kid hugged him at the plate," said an emotional Santorio as he remembered the moment. "So that's a great feeling and obviously our team was uplifted and it's a great story. But if we lost 6-4, everybody there, our kids, myself, we would have been happy."

As the next batter came to the plate, a military cargo plane flew over Sal Maglie Stadium. Not an unusual moment with the Niagara Falls Air base nearby, but for Matt the moment was significant. His father had a passion for watching planes and Matt saw the flyover as a clear sign.

"When the big planes flew over from the Airbase, he loved watching those, it just felt like that was just a message that he was here and we were going to win," said Matt.

Another base hit cut the lead to 6-5 and brought the team's best hitter, Dylan Kelly to the plate with the winning run standing on 2nd base.

"After all that we're saying oh my gosh, we might win here with a base hit," said Santorio.

Kelly completed the comeback.

"When I rounded 1st [base] I saw the ball rolling around the center fielder and it felt like the world stopped. Everything just paused and I just went nuts and it was crazy."

As the joy of the win began to sink in the Vikings thought's quickly returned to their teammate Matt, who had buried his father that morning."

"We were not only excited to win the game but to win it for him on that day," said Chorey.

The victory did more than lift Matt's spirits, it gave him another moment with his father.

"It felt really special because my dad loves baseball so much, it just felt like he was there," said Matt.

"Everyone believes in different things but at that time and that moment I can say the same thing, it was like it was meant to happen. It was like Mr. Lenz was looking over us, the whole game changed in that moment. I don't know what you want to call it but it did seem like a miracle and for some reason it was meant to happen."