

Only 9, Anthony Ford was inspiration to team, community

Maverick hockey players have traveled the country and skated in dozens of big games, but they'll tell you that getting to know 9-year-old Anthony Ford was one of their biggest inspirations. Anthony died Wednesday, April 12, of leukemia.

By Shane Frederick, Free Press staff writer [published in The Free Press, Mankato, MN, 4/13/2006]

Photo by Pat Christman



Anthony Ford "was an inspiration to our guys," Minnesota State men's hockey coach Troy Jutting said Wednesday after Anthony, 9, died of leukemia

MANKATO — [Ryan McKelvie](#) spent four seasons as a hockey player for Minnesota State University. He traveled the country, skated in an NCAA tournament and was an assistant captain for three years.

But during the Mavericks' postseason banquet Sunday, McKelvie said, "one of the greatest experiences I've had on this team," was getting to know Anthony Ford.

Over the last 18 months, 9-year-old Anthony won the hearts of hockey players of all ages, from his rink-rat buddies to McKelvie and other Minnesota State stars.

But Wednesday afternoon, Anthony lost his battle with leukemia. He died at his home, surrounded by close friends and family.

"He was a huge inspiration for every kid for the way he lived his life," McKelvie said from the Ford family's home Wednesday, "for his passion, not just for people, but for life itself."

Anthony was first diagnosed with a rare form of the disease in October of 2004.

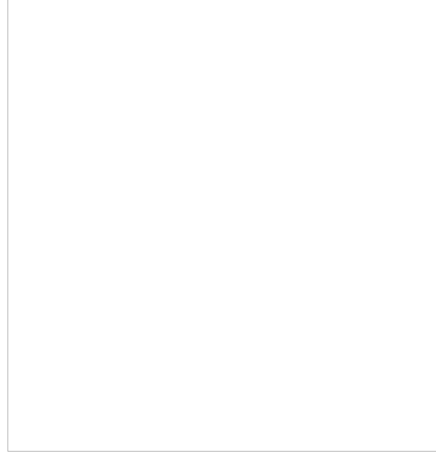
Word spread quickly throughout the community, and he was visited in the hospital and at home by several members of the Minnesota State men's and women's hockey teams.

Short visits quickly turned into fast friendships, and the positive attitude Anthony displayed throughout his treatment, including a bone-marrow transplant a year ago, made a lasting impact on his new buddies.

The visitors were the ones who were supposed to make Anthony laugh, cheer him up and teach him about courage, Mavericks goalie [Chris Clark](#) once said. But, with Anthony, it was often the other way around.

"He was the one who was in a tough situation," said MSU men's hockey coach [Troy Jutting](#), who also said goodbye to Anthony Wednesday. "But he gave out a lot more inspiration than he received back. It takes a special person to be able to do what he's done for the last year and a half."

AF sticker on Mavericks hockey helmet



AF sticker on Mavericks hockey helmet.

Anthony received support from fellow students at [Monroe Elementary](#) and various Mankato-area organizations, and an [online guestbook](#) was filled with page after page of posts offering news, hope and prayers.

But hockey was Anthony's passion and that community rallied around him and his parents, Robin and Michael.

The [Make-A-Wish program](#) gave Anthony a chance to meet NHL legend [Wayne Gretzky](#) last summer, and, in November, he went on a road trip to Anchorage, Alaska, with the Mavericks.

For the last two hockey seasons, every player in the city — youth, high school and college — has had a sticker on his or her helmet with Anthony's initials, and Minnesota State sold purple bracelets that read "AF — ONE TEAM, ONE GOAL" to raise awareness and assist the Ford family with medical costs.

"One team, one goal, it's all about that," family friend Ellen Wild said. "People came together as a hockey community. He's brought a lot of people together."