

Chelsea Elizabeth Parker

May 2, 1990-----November 21, 2013



Chelsea Elizabeth Parker began her softball career at age seven. It all started in early 1997, when she was riding home from school and noticed a sign at the corner of Weddington Road and what used to be Crisco Road (Now George W. Lyles Parkway). The sign was bright yellow and said there were sign ups being held for the city of Concord girls softball recreation league through the Hartsell Athletic Association. From the moment she saw that sign, it was all she talked about. She wanted to play softball and she also wanted me (her father) to be her coach.

I attended the coaches meeting to find out what I needed to do to coach a team of girls. While attending the meeting, my work pager went off and I had to step out of the room to respond to the page. It turned out that the issue at work was serious and I had to leave the meeting early, never went back in the meeting room and didn't get to sign up as a coach. Chelsea was extremely disappointed but still wanted to play.

I took to Chelsea to find out which team she had been drafted on at Hartsell gym approximately a week later. Chelsea had been drafted onto the Concord Heating and Air team and was told when and where the first practice would be.

Chelsea and I went to the first practice which was held on Lyles Field at the Hartsell complex. The head coach of the team asked for volunteers to help with the team. Chelsea looked at me and gave me that "what are you waiting for?" look and I volunteered.

Chelsea and I attended all the practices prior to the start of the season. It was the very last practice and the day prior to what was called "Super Saturday" when the very first game was to be played. An issue occurred and the head coach informed the team while handing out the blue team T-shirts that he would no longer be coaching the team. Chelsea was standing to my left and at the very moment the head coach made his announcement, tugged on my arm and said, "Dad?". I looked down at her and into her worried eyes and said, "I'll coach the team". We played through the season and Chelsea absolutely loved it.

Chelsea continued to play recreationally with me as her coach the next year. I was assigned to the Gate Service Center team and Chelsea was automatically on my team. I drafted the rest of the team. That team proceeded to go undefeated during the season and win the Cabarrus County Recreation Tournament.

During one of the practices prior to that Cabarrus County Recreation Tournament, Robin Phillips approached me on Lyles Field at the Hartsell Complex. Robin asked if I would be interested in turning the undefeated Gate recreation team into an AAU select team that would play strictly in tournaments. I had no idea

what that really meant as at the time there really wasn't select or tournament softball being played in the Concord, North Carolina area.

Robin explained how she envisioned things would work and after understanding myself, I spoke to all of the girls on the Gate recreation team to see if they would be interested in playing in tournaments against other teams. The girls on the team were all for playing so I talked it over with the parents and they were for it as well.

Tryouts were held for additions to the team and six players were added to the roster. The Carolina Sting Rays Ten and Under team was formed and were entered into the very first North Carolina State Tournament which was held in Concord, North Carolina. This is where Chelsea's Select Tournament career began. The Carolina Sting Rays proceeded to win the North Carolina State Tournament that year and proceeded to play in, performed well in and even won some of a handful of tournaments that were held during the year.

Once Chelsea began to play Select Tournament softball it was very difficult to find the time to continue in the recreational leagues. The Select Tournament program began to grow and many more teams were forming which meant that many more tournaments were held. There was no rest for the weary as Chelsea would begin to practice for softball in late January/early February for tournaments which would begin in mid March and run nearly every weekend until the weekend before Thanksgiving in November. Chelsea would take off the month of December and some of January and then would pick up the glove in January and start playing again the next year.

Select Tournament Softball soon became a way of life for Chelsea and her teammates. Early in Chelsea's softball career the Carolina Sting Rays were renamed the Carolina Blue Angels. The Sting Rays/Blue Angels organization as well as Chelsea and her teammates won a North Carolina State tournament in the ten and under, twelve and under, and fourteen and under age categories. Once Chelsea moved to the fourteen and under age group, a second Carolina Blue Angel team was formed for girls in the twelve and under age group.

Over her career Chelsea and her teammates won multiple tournaments, trophies, plaques and even championship rings. During her career, Chelsea had so much fun playing softball and growing with her team. She learned about teamwork and how playing sports emulates life itself. Chelsea talked often to me about how lessons she learned on the field she used in her life as she grew older. She once said to me, "Playing softball is a lot like living life you know." Even though Chelsea personally and her teams received many accolades over her career, Chelsea remained humble. She didn't brag about her accomplishments. She just had fun. She talked to me often of why so many she played against and many of their parents were so serious about playing. She always believed that they put too much pressure on themselves. She never believed that to be right. When people would approach Chelsea to compliment her on her playing ability, she would just smile and say, "Thank you so much but I'm really just having fun." Chelsea always said that if she ever got too serious, she'd quit playing because she wouldn't be having fun anymore.

As her career progressed, Chelsea became very concerned that everyone around her and on her team was having the same fun she was having. She approached me as the head coach to begin what she called "The Trophy Program" on the Carolina Blue Angels. Her plan was that as the Carolina Blue Angels won trophies or plaques for tournament wins, the players and team coaches would anonymously vote for the best team player for the tournament. The player with the most votes would be awarded the tournament trophy or plaque. The only other rule that Chelsea wanted is that no one on the team could win a second trophy until every single teammate had at least one.

As time went on Chelsea became very concerned about the younger girls in the Carolina Blue Angels organization and asked me to implement what she called "The Big Sister Program". Chelsea's plan here was that each of the younger girls from the twelve and under team be paired with a player from the fourteen and under team. The older girl would be the "big sister" to the younger girl and serve as a mentor. The older girl would be there for the younger girl on and off the field. Chelsea felt that while the younger girl would benefit from the program as she would have someone she could have a relationship with in situations that may occur in the younger girl's life, the older girl would also benefit in that she would have to learn the responsibility and accountability of someone counting on her.

Chelsea began her softball career as a child who knew very little about what she was involving herself in when she just wanted to sign up just to play softball. Over the course of her 10 year career, softball continued to be "just fun" for Chelsea but the entire experience allowed Chelsea to grow into a young woman who learned how to be a reliable teammate who cared immensely about her peers, opponents and the younger athletes. She said on more than one occasion after her career ended, "Every kid needs to have the fun I had playing." and "I'm going to make sure my kids get to have all the fun I had on the field." While Chelsea was "having fun"

playing, she did everything in her power to ensure that her teammates, opponents and younger athletes were having the same “fun” experience she was having.

We lost our beloved Chelsea when she passed away far too young on November 21st, 2013 at the age of only twenty three years old. This “fun” experience was most important to Chelsea. It is for this reason that in the memory of Chelsea Elizabeth Parker we begin the journey of creating a fund to financially assist athletes who require assistance. The goal of this fund is to assist athletes who are unable to have the experiences which Chelsea held so dear in her heart and soul due to financial hardship, have the opportunity to have those very same experiences. In this journey of creating this fund and helping to procure that those in financial hardship have the opportunities to have these experiences, we are also keeping Chelsea’s memory and “fun loving” legacy alive for her young son that she left far too early. Thank you in advance for any contribution or donation to the Chelsea Parker Memorial Athlete Assistance Fund on behalf of Chelsea’s entire family.



