

## FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE



Tyler Holliday, 12, of West Chester Twp., and his mother, Jeanette, visit with Miami University baseball coach Danny Hayden. Team IMPACT has partnered with the team to give Tyler an opportunity to become part of the RedHawks. He was recently added to the team's roster. LAUREN OLSON / MIAMI UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

# College squads embrace these young teammates

**Two Butler boys facing medical challenges find support in sports.**

**By Ellen Hadley**  
Staff Writer

BUTLER COUNTY — Two college sports teams recently announced the addition of Butler County players to their rosters — even though the recruits haven't yet started high school.

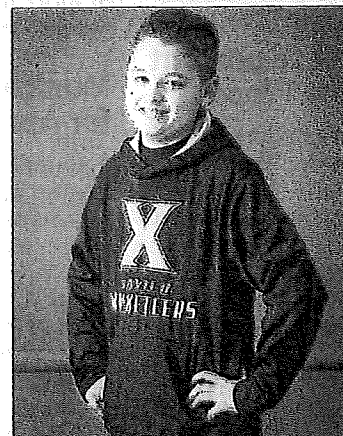
The Miami University baseball team recently announced the addition of 12-year-old Tyler Holliday, of West Chester Twp., to its roster. And the Xavier University men's bas-

ketball team, which faces the Arizona Wildcats tonight in the Sweet Sixteen, has drafted 15-year-old Trey Couch, of Liberty Twp. — all part of an organization's efforts to boost the quality of life for children facing life-threatening or chronic illnesses.

Team IMPACT matches these children with local college athletic teams as "a boost to improve their quality of life both socially and psychologically," according to its website.

"Finding a place that Tyler can be accepted and be put back into normal situations

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Trey Couch, an Liberty Junior High School student with a neurodegenerative disease, is a "big part" of the Xavier men's basketball team. GREG LYNCH / STAFF

## LOCAL & STATE

### Teammates

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has been fantastic for him and his healing," said his mother, Jeanette.

Tyler was a typical 8-year-old when his parents began to notice spots on his body. After seeing a doctor, he was diagnosed with chicken pox but just six days later he lost all mental function. He was rushed to the hospital and was ultimately diagnosed with Rocky Mountain spotted fever, an infection that was the result of a tick bite.

The infection attacked all of the organs in his body with the exception of his lungs. Tyler was in a coma for a month and spent the following month and a half in ICU. After being released from the hospital, Tyler had to use a wheelchair and feeding tube. Through therapy, he has relearned how to eat and walk.

At a ceremony March 4, Tyler was drafted to be the newest RedHawk and received his own jersey, glove and apparel.

"To see how excited he was today and to meet 35 new buddies, it's a really neat thing," said Danny Hayden, Miami baseball head coach. "It will have just as big of an impact

on our guys too. Seeing somebody that has such a great attitude and family support is such a wonderful sight to see. Tyler is smiling 99 percent of the time."

Tyler has eight team advocates, including freshman outfielder Brooks Urich.

"I'm excited to have Tyler be a part of our team," said Urich. "It brings us back to earth, too, in that we're fortunate to be here and playing baseball. He also brings a light to the game and having him around reminds us that it's just a game at the end of the day and that there are a lot of other things in life that are important."

Trey, a seventh-grader at Liberty Junior High School, was a basketball and football player when at age 8 his parents noticed he was having problems with basic motor skills.

Soon Trey could not stand on one leg any more or jump rope. He started dropping things and getting tremors.

Signs of trouble also started to show up on the football field and basketball court. Drills became harder to execute.

He also started to experience ataxic gait, where his movements and balance are affected by his

surroundings, and had difficulty walking.

He was eventually diagnosed with cerebellar degeneration in 2010. The disease affects the area of the brain that controls coordination and balance, and it has no cure.

"I never thought I would be on a basketball team and do stuff like that. Now I do," said Trey, who attends every Xavier home game and most of their practices.

Trey has received treatment at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Johns Hopkins Hospital, and currently works with professionals at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

It was through Cincinnati Children's that his mother, Gina, learned about Team IMPACT.

"The reason I picked Team IMPACT is because it's all sports based," she said.

She thought the organization would be a good fit for Trey, whose medical complications had sidelined him from a player to a "coaching role," alongside his dad.

Trey was "drafted" in 2013 by Xavier's basketball program and will remain with the team through the 2015-16 season.

"He's a big part of our

team," Xavier senior center Matt Stainbrook said.

It's not unusual for Stainbrook to get text messages from Trey saying "Better beat Butler" and "Better beat Georgetown" on game day.

That encouragement goes both ways, according to Trey's mom.

"There are times just with his struggles that I feel if he didn't have the organization and didn't have the basketball team and Team IMPACT — it lifts him up on days. It makes him want to get out of bed. It's something to look forward to," Gina said.

The impact is mutual, Stainbrook said. Trey gives the team perspective on life, he said, adding that "he's a part of something bigger than himself."

In addition to basketball, Trey has joined the team to go bowling, to a Cincinnati Reds game and to lunch.

"It makes him feel typical and like he can tackle any challenge," Gina said.

*This article contains reporting from the Miami University Athletics Department.*

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