

More than a game

Luke Roux Memorial event is a night to reflect, take action

By John Fitts

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Farmington Valley Generals coach Mike Barone during the National Anthem.

Farmington Valley Generals head coach Mike Barone thinks about Luke Roux at every game. It's during the national anthem, hand over his heart and head bowed, that Barone thinks of both Luke, a 17-year-old Farmington High School graduate whose life was cut short by a drunken driver in June of 2022, and Jack Phelan, the beloved Farmington High School athletic director who died in July of 2020.

"I kind of say, 'look upon this team; bless them for what they play; make sure they leave the rink healthy; and we think about you both Luke and Jack,'" Barone said. "I say that every game. It means a lot to me."

Luke's quiet leadership and moral character is ever-present, but on Jan. 4, his memory, along with the family's mission to prevent other tragedies, was on full display during the third annual Luke Roux Memorial Game at Avon Old Farms' Jennings-Fairchild Rink.



Luke Roux and his older brothers when they were little. Steve Roux estimates that Luke was about 7 years old at the time. From left are Edison, Nathan and Luke.

A Hockey Family

Luke had many interests and loved all kinds of sports and gaming, but there's no denying the Roux family is a hockey tribe. Luke and his older brothers Edison and Nathan grew up with the game, inspired by dad Steve's love of playing hockey and rooting for the Chicago Blackhawks.

Steve fell into coaching through a learn-to-skate program with his eldest son Nathan and went on to serve many coaching roles with the West Hartford Youth Hockey Association.

While Steve didn't coach high school hockey, the addition of "split" season play meant that he had the chance to coach Luke from the time he took the ice.

"I actually had the opportunity to coach Luke all the way from age 4 to 17, which was great," he said.

When Luke's brothers played competitively in Massachusetts, Steve and their mom, Carri Roux, would split weekend duties, with members of the community ensuring Luke, who stayed in local programs, got to the rink.

And then there was the backyard rink at the Roux's Farmington home, where for 10 years, friendships and a love of hockey were stoked on the ice and around the fire pit.



Luke Roux and his older brothers when they were little. Steve Roux estimates that Luke was about 7 years old at the time. From left are Edison, Nathan and Luke.

Farmington Valley Generals

Luke, who graduated from FHS in 2022 just days before he died, practiced with the Generals – a co-op hockey team with players from Farmington, Avon, Windsor and Lewis Mills high schools – his sophomore year. He made the team his junior year and played again his senior year.

With the Generals, Luke was a skilled defenseman, skating regular shifts, and a crucial part of their penalty kills. He was a quiet leader, somehow effective yet gentle in a game not known for that last trait.

“He was very quiet in the locker room but his demeanor on the ice and his play was like a really gentle hockey player, which is hard to say that sometimes, but he was,” Barone said.

Brendan Occhino, who graduated with Luke, served as captain for the Generals his senior year. He was also Luke’s classmate and friend.

“He was super kind... just an amazing individual on and off the ice,” Occhino said. “He was really a role model for us, his teammates, in terms of how to carry yourself, how to treat other people with respect and all those things. He was just a great person.”

At the game, Luke’s memory was honored in many ways. Prior to the ceremonial puck drop, as Luke’s jersey hung behind the bench, his right defensive position on the ice remained unfilled. The ceremonial puck, which Barone wrapped in tape with the date, a heart and Luke’s number #16, was dropped on the ice and then passed through the net to Carri. The game began, and the Generals defeated the Glastonbury Guardians 10-5.

The Luke Roux Foundation

But as much as the game is in honor to Luke, it is also a call to action.

On June 25, 2022, the day he died, Luke took a walk with his mother, played some disc golf, did housework and played an evening game of baseball, another favorite sport.

He had two RBIs in that game but never enjoyed his chocolate milk and snack at home. A drunken driver traveling nearly twice the speed limit ran a red light and struck Luke's car just a few miles from the family's home in Farmington.

After Luke's death, the family worked on a multi-faceted approach in hopes of supporting the activities Luke loved, helping other families avoid their situation and reminding people to be kind to one another. Last year, the Luke Roux Memorial Fund officially morphed into the non-profit Luke Roux Foundation.

Its mission "is to reduce fatalities caused by impaired driving today and work toward eliminating them tomorrow. It continues to support organizations focused on raising awareness about destructive driving, will work with partners to utilize technology to eliminate impaired driving, and supports those organizations that helped shape Luke's distinct character, including but not limited to hockey and baseball."

Displayed at the game were photos of Luke along with shirts and posters with messages such as "If you drink, don't drive. Decide to Ride."

Luke's dad, Steve, said those and other messages build on the decades-long Don't Drink and Drive campaigns.

"Once you drink, your decision-making capability diminishes dramatically," he said. "So that's why you see if you're going to drink, decide to ride. We want to get people thinking about that before the first drink."

During the pre-game ceremony, Occhino detailed some of those strategies:

1. Have a plan BEFORE consuming your first drink.
2. If you plan to drink, designate a non-drinking driver before going out.
3. Get a ride home if you've been drinking.
4. Don't let friends drink and drive.

On its social media account, the foundation grabs attention with creative, yet stark reminders. One reads "Don't be the reason someone's family starts a foundation in 2025. Plan your safe ride home before you go out tonight."

After Luke's death, the family received confirmation that the message was reaching people, Carri said. One college student left his car home to avoid temptation; a woman stepped in to prevent an impaired college student from driving, noting she probably would have remained silent prior to Luke's death. Several others shared stories of adult children insisting that friends use ride-share services in questionable situations.

"We're not doing this for us," Carri said. "We're doing this so no one else has to suffer like us. Unfortunately, I think we're aware and statistics are showing that awareness alone isn't enough, and through our foundation, that's one of the pillars that we're hoping to change."

Behind the scenes, the family is working hard on public policy and lobbying for continued implementation of smart vehicle technology, such as systems that limit speeds and prevent impaired individuals from driving.

But even seemingly small change can have profound effects. The foundation also encourages everyone to simply spread kindness, even in the smallest of situations.

Barone will always fondly remember the post-morning hockey practice trips to Dunkin Donuts, where he'd wait in line and Luke would grab and go. Luke, of course, gave his coach a lesson in smartphone technology and the two continued to laugh about it.

"That's the kind of character he was," Barone said. "He was just a very likable person."

The foundation continues to pay it forward with yearly scholarships to players who exemplify "Luke's characteristics of humility, kindness, discipline, consistency, and work ethic." One is given to a West Hartford youth participant who is a senior at Conard or Hall and the other to a Generals player.

Through it all, Luke's death is a stark reminder to live life to its fullest.

"Going to this game every year puts it all into perspective of how lucky I am to share time with my family, share time with friends, all those things," Occhino said. "I feel very fortunate, very lucky to be standing here and honor Luke's memory."

For more information on the foundation and its mission, visit www.lukeroux.com or follow via www.facebook.com/THELUKEROUXFOUNDATION or @luke_rouxfoundation on Instagram.



Former Farmington Valley Generals players who played with Luke attend the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game on Saturday, Jan. 4. (Courtesy Photo).



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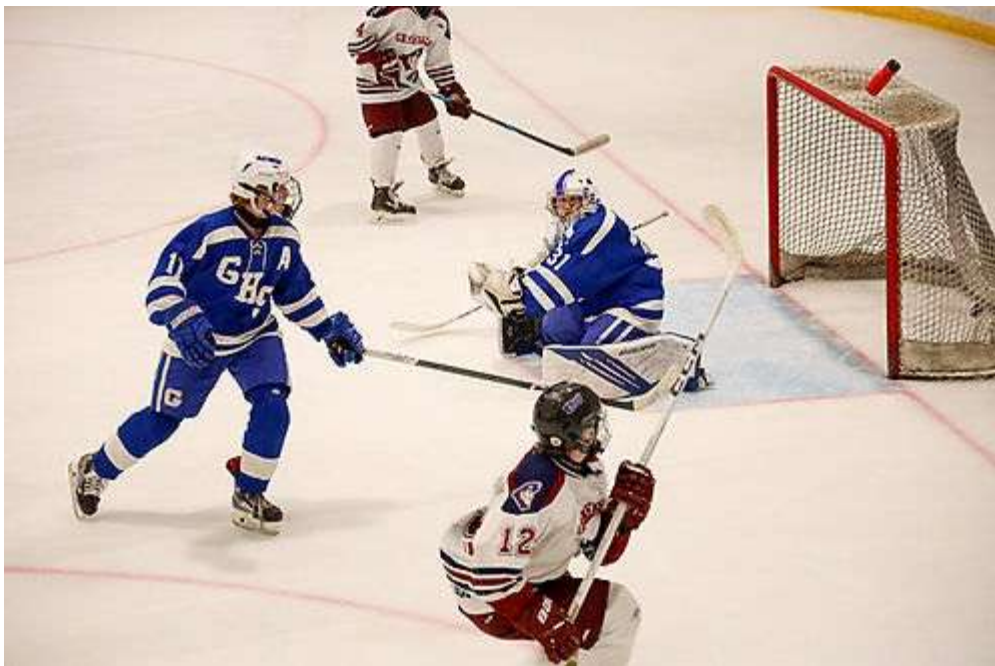
Former Farmington Valley Generals players who played with Luke attend the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game on Saturday, Jan. 4. (Courtesy Photo).



Working at the ticket table for the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game, from left, are Candice Casey, Lisa Stambaugh and AmyBeth Wahl. Photo by John Fitts



Farmington Valley Generals players celebrate a goal during the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game on Saturday, Jan. 4. The team won 10-5. Photo by John Fitts



Senior Tucker Labrecque of Farmington, who is team captain, watches as the puck goes in the net during the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game on Saturday, Jan. 4. The Farmington Valley Generals beat Glastonbury 10-5. Photo by John Fitts



Senior Brendan McLaughlin of Avon controls the puck for the Generals. Photo by John Fitts



Junior Emerson Stambaugh of Farmington controls the puck during the Third Annual Luke Roux Memorial Game on Saturday, Jan. 4. Photo by John Fitts