

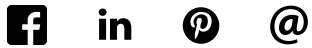
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FEATURED

LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL: Keeping a promise

PATRICK MURPHY PATRICK.MURPHY@NEWSANDTRIBUNE.COM

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Grayson Deckard, front, and Clayton Deckard, rear, pose a picture at Silver Creek Little League. Clayton continued to coach Silver Creek's 12U All-Star team in honor of Grayson, who passed away March 16 after battling cancer.

[Photos courtesy Keith Russell](#)

SELLERSBURG — Clayton Deckard kept a promise this Little League season to continue coaching the Silver Creek 12U All-Star team.

During the District 5 Tournament, Deckard wore his orange Silver Creek shirt with tan shorts and a silver cross around his neck. He high-fived all 12 of the players. However, there was one player notably missing from the squad.

A banner of blonde-haired, hazel-eyed Grayson Deckard, Clayton's son, was on display throughout the district tourney at Clarksville Little League. For four nights, the banner hung near Silver Creek's dugout so he could always be with his father and former teammates. Grayson Deckard, 11, passed away on March 16 following a battle with cancer.

"He was my little buddy and my only child," the 45-year-old Clayton Deckard said. "It was like having a little mini-me and best friend. Baseball is all he wanted to do. That's what we did, and I provided him every opportunity I could. We went to (hitting and pitching) lessons for years. He was a lefty and he was starting to grow and develop into a solid player. It's unfortunate how things happened."

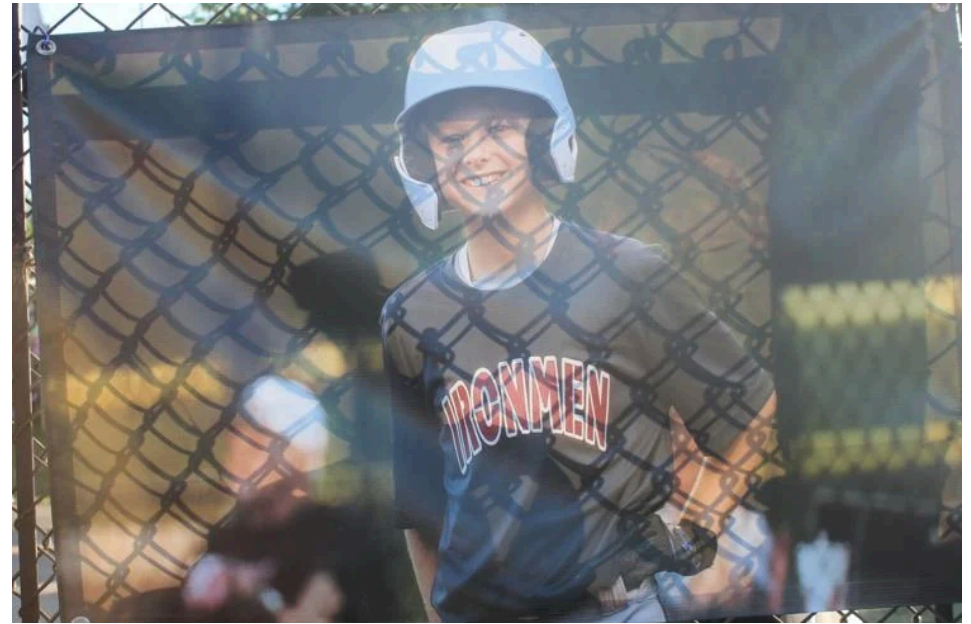
From the age of 5, Grayson's heart belonged to baseball. He lived and breathed the sport. When he wasn't playing it outside, he was doing so inside, facing off against long-time best friend Kye Stein in the MLB The Show video game. The two were inseparable with sleepovers between tournaments, spending time outside riding tractors and enjoying America's pastime.

“We had been playing baseball together since the second grade,” Stein said. “We were both lefties on the team. It was fun playing baseball with him.”

GRAYSON'S JOURNEY

Grayson started having leg problems while running the bases at a travel-ball tournament with Ironmen Prime-Deckard in the spring of 2023. It happened suddenly and almost immediately alarmed his father.

“We noticed when he would hit the ball he would have a hard time running the bases,” Clayton recalled. “He would take off running and would limp and I was like: ‘Dude what’s wrong with you?’ He didn’t look normal while he ran and I didn’t know what was going on. We thought it could have been growth plates, you know the kids are growing at that age.”



A banner of Grayson Deckard hangs near Silver Creek’s dugout during the recent District 5 Tournament at the Clarksville Little League.

[Patrick Murphy | News and Tribune](#)



Clayton drove his fifth-grader to have an MRI scan on April 30 last year at Norton Children's Hospital in

Grayson Deckard makes a diving catch for the Silver Creek 10U All-Stars during a game in 2022.

Photo courtesy Keith Russell

Louisville to see what was wrong. That was when Clayton received devastating news — a tumor was located near Grayson's spine, suffocating all of the nerves and affecting his left leg and lower extremities.

"It was the worst news you could possibly get," Clayton said.

A short time later, Grayson had surgery to remove the tumor. A week-and-a-half later, doctors diagnosed him with high-grade glioma, malignant, difficult-to-treat tumors which grow quickly in the brain or spinal cord.

The next step was for rehab at Frazier Rehabilitation Institute.

The Deckards missed the 2023 Little League season while Grayson went through therapy and treatments. Last summer, father and son traveled to Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis for radiation therapy, which utilized X-rays or similar forms of radiation. During that time, the Silver Creek 10U team was in Indianapolis for the state tournament.

"We stayed in the hotel for a couple of nights to watch the 10U team win state," Clayton recalled. "We were in much better shape then than we were in the end."

Grayson went through another cycle of radiation therapy in Indianapolis in November. The cancer, however, didn't respond to treatments. On March 16, Grayson Deckard passed away.

In the days between his passing and his funeral, 11U Ironmen Prime-Deckard urged players to leave their bats on their front porches "with words of encouragement and support," according to a March 22 Facebook post. They were also encouraged to post pictures of their bats.

"It goes to show it's more than just baseball," Clayton said. "We might compete against each other day-in and day-out, but the whole community of baseball people come together because we care about all of them, whether we play against them or not. They're still our kids as a community and they're important."

The community responded with hundreds of pictures of baseball and softball bats on porches from around the state, and beyond.

"It meant a lot to all of us and it showed respect," said Silas Land, a three-year teammate of Grayson. "People thought highly of him outside of baseball."

At Grayson's funeral on March 27, Silver Creek All-Stars and Ironmen Prime-Deckard players wore their jerseys in honor of their former teammate.



Megan Horstman set her children's bats on her front porch in memory of Grayson Deckard on March 23.

Photo provided



Players for the Silver Creek 12U All-Star and 11U Ironmen Prime-Deckard teams stand outside the Garr Funeral Home in Sellersburg on March 27 for Grayson Deckard's funeral.

Photo submitted

REMEMBERING GRAYSON

Landyn Russell, 12, had played with Grayson since both were on Silver Creek's 7U All-Star team. The last time the two shared the field was in 2022.

"I remember one time when it was cold outside and we were huddled under a blanket in the dugout and we were just hanging out," Russell recalled. "It was something I will never forget."

When Silver Creek was batting, Grayson was the first to start the cheers for his teammates when they were up to bat. Russell said he admired his teammates' positive attitude and willingness to help the squad.

During this year's District 5 Tournament, Silver Creek wore No. 1 patches on their sleeves and orange-blue bracelets on their wrists. They also had bag tags on their equipment in honor of their former teammate.

"I think we will all attest that Grayson's loss was huge and a big void will be there for a while," said Kaci Stein, Kye's mother. "Coach Clayton and Kye find their relief in baseball, that's where they feel closest to Grayson and that is where they both find their happiness."

FOLLOWING THROUGH ON HIS PLEDGE

Clayton coached Silver Creek's 12U All-Star team this year to fulfill a promise he made to Grayson and the other players. He plans to continue that pledge next year too.

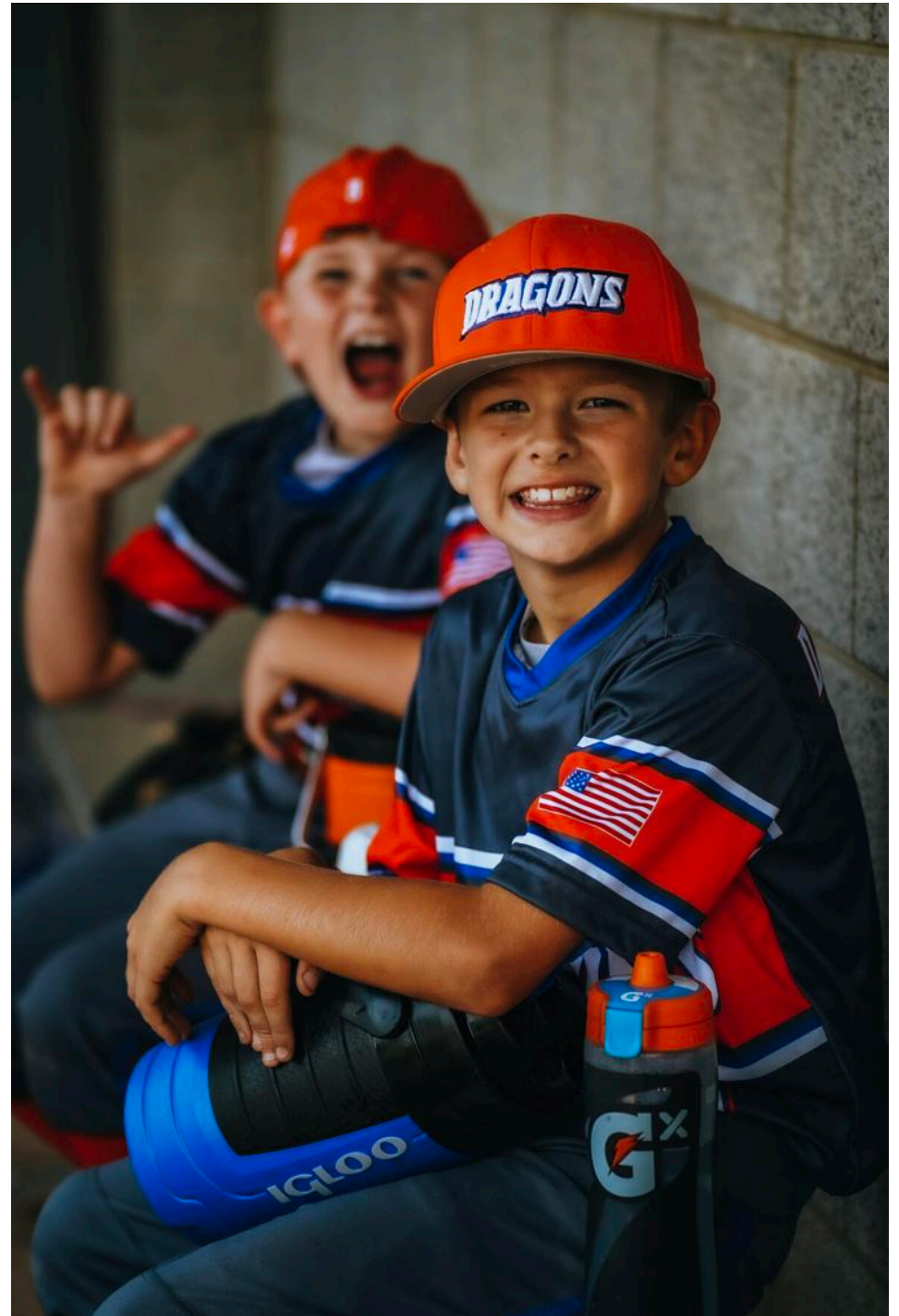
Most of the players on the travel and All-Star teams are entering their sixth-grade year in school. He said he'll coach the Silver Creek Middle School team for two years as well.

"I do it because I enjoy watching these kids and helping them develop and grow into better baseball players," Clayton said. "My goal is to help this age group grow to where they need to be for high school. We want to continue doing what the high school is doing because that makes the program and these kids better. And because that's what I would be doing for my son. I need to continue to coach for the kids who have been around my kid for all these years."



Silver Creek 10U All-Stars Kye Stein, left, stands with Grayson Deckard and William Haynes, right, in the outfield during a break in the action during a game in 2022.

[Photo courtesy Keith Russell](#)



Grayson Deckard, front, and Kye Stein, back, smile while waiting for their at-bats for the Silver Creek 10U All-Star team in 2022. Stein had been friends with Deckard since the second grade.

Photo courtesy Keith Russell

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