

MSU softball players help fight cancer battle for friends, family

By Brittany Young

MSU softball players Jessica Cooley and Erin Nesbit both have friends or family who have battled cancer, pushing them to be active in increasing breast cancer awareness.

Cooley, a senior from Birmingham, Ala., donated her hair to “Locks of Love” (a non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to children suffering from long term medical hair loss from any diagnoses) in September 2012 after a friend of her family lost the cancer battle.

“Her name was Lynn Purfer and she was in her 50s. She and my mom worked together and I would always visit Lynn in her office. Lynn’s daughter and I also had sleepovers and hung out together,” Cooley said. “After the funeral, my sister and I decided to donate our hair in memory of Lynn; I donated about nine or 10 inches.”

Nesbit, a redshirt junior from Acworth, Ga., has a younger sister who beat Retinoblastoma, cancer that develops during early childhood in the retina of the eye. She is currently a manager on the softball team.

“My mom started noticing Megan’s eyes looking funny in pictures, so she would cover Meg’s eyes to see how she reacted; whenever my mom covered Meg’s left eye, she cried and swatted her hand away. We later found out the cancer had already taken her sight,” Nesbit said. “When she was three, Meg had surgery to make sure the cancer didn’t spread to her brain, but she lost her right eye. God definitely had his hand on Meg because we were blessed the doctors caught it in time. She’s been through a lot and still does everyday. She is one of the strongest girls I know, and I’m lucky to call her my sister.”

April 12 to 14, the Bulldogs hosted rival Ole Miss in a three-game conference clash. On Sunday, the Bulldogs wore pink to strike out cancer.

Nesbit said she played in honor of her best friend’s mom.

“Her name is Kathryn Keller, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer earlier this year. Just like Megan, Ms. Keller is a fighter, and with God’s help, she’s going to beat this,” Nesbit said. “She’s one of the sweetest ladies I know, always looking to help those around her. I figured that honoring and playing for her was the least I could do for all she and her family has been through.”

Cooley said the team wore face paint and stickers in the “pink” game to commemorate those affected by cancer.

“My sister, who played softball at MSU, had a teammate survive cancer. I have a close friend who survived cancer, and one of the softball coach’s mom survived it as well,” Cooley said. “So, we all wore face paint and stickers with initials in honor of people who have lost the battle and survived the disease.”

Cooley and Nesbit are members of the M-Club at MSU, where they are able to give back to the Bulldog and Starkville community. On April 12, the softball team participated in the name sale for “Relay for Life,” a walking event to fight back against cancer.

Nesbit said the athletic department raised roughly \$1,600 for the event.

“It was great to see our Bulldog family pull together for one specific cause,” Nesbit said.

Cooley said the relay was a lot of fun, and she really enjoyed the event.

“Cancer touches everyone in some way, so it’s good to get everyone together for a good cause,” Cooley said.

Head coach Vann Stuedeman said both girls are passionate about anything they put their minds to and they play softball with this same love and passion.

“They both are passionate warriors and make each moment count,” Stuedeman said. “I’m proud of them and the entire softball team for raising awareness and money to support those families who have been affected by the horrible disease.”

Cooley, Nesbit and the rest of the softball team return to action April 19 to 21 as the Bulldogs travel to Tuscaloosa for a three-game series against defending national champion, Alabama.