

## **RANDI PERKINS BATTLED CANCER, PLAYED SPORTS WITH FEISTY ATTITUDE**

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During her 16 years, Randi Perkins developed the reputation of having a feisty attitude - from her competitive edge in sports to her playful prodding of two older sisters.

It was a characteristic Perkins perhaps learned from her mother, Teresa Lewis, who had yearned since her adolescence to name a child Randy or Randi. But Teresa said Randi's father, Kevin Perkins, "wouldn't allow it."

"So when Randi was born, I didn't ask him," said Teresa, whose other daughters are Christina (now 21) and Rochelle (20). "I said, 'Meet our daughter, Randi.' "

Although she was the youngest of the Perkins trio, Randi never gave into her sisters, whether the challenge was softball, basketball or shopping. A talented catcher, she once told them that when they were "old and fat, I'll be in the Hall of Fame."

It was an attitude that Randi Perkins carried to her death last February, when a rare form of cancer - "undifferentiated sarcoma," found primarily among the elderly - claimed her life. She often told family and friends she didn't lose her battle with cancer.

As Teresa remembers, Randi said, "Mom, I don't want people to think I lost this fight. I hate it when people say 'she gave it a good fight.' Just because I don't make it doesn't mean I lost. I'm just fighting it from a different angle."

Today, as the Perkins' family celebrates the Thanksgiving holiday and her Marquette teammates prepare for the basketball season, their thoughts will be focused on the person who touched their lives in a positive way.

"It always sounds so cliché, someone dies and everyone says they were the best person on earth," Mustangs senior Stacy Arnson said. "But seriously, she was the most remarkable person I ever met."

Perkins wanted to play softball in college. She began playing at the Ballwin Athletic Association and in 1998 moved onto Marquette High in west St. Louis County. At the time, Christina was a senior and Rochelle a junior. Before Randi's freshman year, they discussed the possibility of being on the same team for the first time.

"I said, 'Randi, if you make the varsity, you know we'll be on the same team,' " Christina said. "I remember, she was like, 'If? . . . If?'"

Perkins proved her ability by playing on the varsity softball team as a freshman. She also excelled in basketball and was bumped up to the junior varsity team her first year.

"She was good," Marquette varsity coach Scott Cleer said. "I remember her freshman year, she had a feisty attitude."

By then, she already won her first bout with cancer in eighth grade when she had a cancerous growth removed from her leg and underwent chemotherapy. The treatments made her ill and she lost her hair, but she was determined to play as a freshman.

"She didn't really focus on (the cancer)," Smith said. "She was an athlete first. That was her life - sports. Cancer was just a situation she had to deal with."

Perkins would have to deal with it again after her freshman year when it returned in her lungs. Although it forced her back into therapy and away from athletics, the cancer still seemed not to be a big deal to Randi, according to those around her.

"Her sophomore year, when she didn't play, she was ticked off," Cleer said. "But this was going to be something that was going to take a surgery, she would get rid of it, and this would be a temporary setback."

The second time, Perkins seemed to have slam-dunked the disease. She was cleared to compete again before her junior year, which she planned to be her best. However, she experienced some disappointment when she didn't get to play in her final softball game.

"She sat the bench the whole game and never complained," Teresa remembers. "When the game was over, she packed up her gear, and her last trip walking across that softball field was with her head up high."

Perkins' disappointment was brief as the excitement of a basketball gained her attention. However, the cancer returned once again, and it was spreading - quickly.

Randi had surgery on Nov. 11 of 2000 to remove a malignant tumor from her back and lungs. Again, the operation appeared to be a success.

Randi spent Thanksgiving Day in the hospital, but her family visited and posed for a group picture. "It was the first time we had everybody together," Teresa said.

Perkins returned to the Marquette basketball team in January, wearing a trademark bandana that had inspired young cancer patients during her treatments.

"They were five years old, six years old, eight years old," Teresa said. "They were starting chemo, and their hair was falling out. Randi always wore a bandana, and one day threw some extra ones in her bag just in case. She walked into the office and gave them each a bandana and showed them how to tie it and look cute. They were like 'Wow.' . . . They wanted to be like her."

Perkins didn't mind being a role model, but deep down inside she just wanted to play ball.

"I remember taking her to treatment and she would tell the doctor, 'You're going to have to pass (medicine) through faster . . . I've got a game tonight,'" Rochelle said.

Marquette officials held a ceremony before a game to show support for Perkins. A local television station covered the game and asked Randi to wear a microphone.

"She told me, 'I can't wear this,' " Cleer said. "I said, 'Why not?' She said, 'How am I going to score with this on me?' "

Her last game was on Jan. 25 at the Lindbergh tournament. Shortly thereafter the cancer returned.

"When they told us she was dying, my heart sunk," Smith said. "I'd known her for so long and I knew how strong she was . . . that she overcame it so many times. Once they said that, I was like, 'This cannot be happening.' "

Randi knew what was happening.

"She asked me 'Mom, are you going to be OK?' " Teresa said. "I said, 'Not without your help.' She also told me, 'You have to help the kids.' "

Before her death on Feb. 22, Randi and her mom created the idea for a charity foundation called "Kids Helping Kids."

A college scholarship will be given to a female student at Marquette each year. Donations can be sent to 473 Westglen Village Dr., Ballwin, Mo., 63021.

"She always said that cancer can't consume your life," Teresa said. "I can only guess by telling me to help the kids that she wants them to be given as many opportunities as possible . . . to experience life in a way she was not able to."

Randi experienced a lot in a short time, and in January, she'll be honored for her accomplishments. She will be inducted into the St. Louis chapter of the National Softball Association Hall of Fame - just as Randi had predicted.

Caption: PHOTO

Photo by [STLTODAY.COM](http://STLTODAY.COM) - Randi Perkins focused on sports at Marquette High rather than cancer.

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