



Honoring memory of late DLS star, Wolf

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They gathered early Tuesday morning at Lafayette's Queen of Heaven Cemetery for a tearful gravesite toast to Frank Wolf on the one-year anniversary of his shocking death at 35.

Wolf's parents, Mike and Rosemarie, his five siblings, Shon, Pat, Tom, Joe and Gina Roth, and a host of relatives and close friends stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the bright sunshine. They shared memories of the former De La Salle High School baseball and football player with a smile so dazzling it could light up the darkest room.

A year after Wolf died of aortic dissection, the same mysterious heart ailment that felled actor John Ritter, his family and friends are still struggling to cope with the loss of one so young and so vibrant.

Out of their grief was born the Frank Wolf Memorial Scholarship Fund. Shortly after the gravesite toast, Wolf's family held its first fund-raising event, a golf tournament, banquet, auction and raffle at Oakhurst Country Club. Money raised will go each year to a college scholarship for a DLS or Carondelet graduate.

"We wanted something where we could pull everyone together every year but also have a cause that made sense for who Frank was," said Joe Wolf, the youngest of Frank's four brothers. "The scholarship fund made the most sense for who Frank was."

Frank Wolf was the baby of a large family with

strong ties to DLS. Pat, Tom and Joe attended the school and played football, among other sports. Gina attended Carondelet and kept statistics for the Spartans baseball team. Frank's mom ran the snack shack at football games for 14 years, and his father was heavily involved in the booster club, long before DLS became the sports power it is today.

Former Spartans basketball star and current San Antonio Spur Brent Barry was just one of a seemingly endless list of those who became Frank's friends.

"Just a huge, huge heart," Barry said of Wolf. "A guy who really enjoyed his friends and was always surrounded by them."

"It's funny that it was Frank's heart that ended up being the problem and the reason why he passed away. It was the biggest part of him."

Wolf played shortstop for DLS and went on to play baseball for Los Medanos College and Cal-State Northridge. That made sense if you consider his family tree.

Wolf's mother is a DiMaggio. Her father and former Yankees great Joe DiMaggio's father were cousins.


"I met Joe many, many times," Mike Wolf said. "He and my father-in-law were pretty close."

In a video tribute to Frank, there's one picture of him standing wide-eyed next to DiMaggio, who was sitting in a lounge chair.

Despite his baseball skills, Frank is remembered more for quarterbacking DLS's football team in 1989, his senior season.

Wolf had never played quarterback on the varsity level and had barely played the position his entire life. He was a wide receiver and defensive back. Let's


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just say he didn't have a rocket throwing arm. But DLS coach Bob Ladouceur was desperate for someone athletic and intelligent enough to run his veer offense.

Tag, you're it.

"Frank was pretty athletic," Ladouceur said. "I didn't have one of those kind of guys on the team I felt could handle all the responsibilities of quarterback, especially running the football.

"He had a lot of confidence. He never got discouraged, never got deterred. He just kept plugging away. "... I really liked him a lot. He had a very infectious smile. He was just a nice kid. We wouldn't have had him at quarterback if he didn't have the personality for it, too. All his peers loved him."

Wolf took what Ladouceur called a "crash course" in quarterbacking and, understandably, struggled early. The Spartans lost two of their first four games, a cataclysmic start for such a football powerhouse that featured future NFL stars Amani Toomer and Aaron Taylor. But the Spartans never lost again that season and went on to win the North Coast Section championship.

"He pulled us through at the end of the year with his leadership," said former Spartan Matt Clizbe, who went on to play for Cal and in the Canadian Football League. "We needed a guy to step in. He was the guy."

After college, Wolf became close friends with Jeff Dudum and his cousin, Tony Dudum, both restaurateurs. Each has honored Wolf at separate Walnut Creek restaurants.

Tony engraved Wolf's initials into the bar at his 1515 Restaurant and Lounge. A picture of Wolf

hangs beyond that spot, behind the bar.

At McCovey's Restaurant, Wolf's No. 17 De La Salle jersey hangs prominently on the brick divider between the bar and the main room. The restaurant is filled with pro memorabilia and jerseys with names such as Mays, McCovey, Ripken, Rice, Jordan and Gretzky. But Wolf's is the only jersey of an amateur.

"To us he was just the best," Jeff Dudum said. "He was a good friend. Loyal. He was always there for us. It was something I thought the family would love to see. Frank, he was part of our family."

Just three months before his death, Wolf had left his longtime job in sales and moved from Walnut Creek to Sarasota, Fla., where Joe and his family lived. He had passed his real estate exam and planned a new career.

But one night while on a dinner date, his heart, which had been causing him some pain, simply gave out.


"You know, mothers and fathers should go first," said Rosemarie, who is battling cancer. "Not the children. This year I've heard from so many people who have lost their children. It is so heart-breaking.

"And this was "... out of the blue. Nobody in the family had this. It seems like the doctors should look closer. Who are we to say? They're practicing. The doctors are practicing."

Gina said the family is considering filing a malpractice lawsuit. But most of their energy is going toward raising money for the scholarship fund and making sure "everyone remembers Frank" and his legacy.

During the dinner program Tuesday night, the


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Wolfs got a call from Toomer, a wide receiver for the reigning Super Bowl champion New York Giants. Toomer donated his autographed Giants jersey from the Super Bowl, which was auctioned off for \$1,300, and a regular autographed Giants jersey that went for \$1,000.

To request more information on the fund, contact the Wolfs at frankwolffmemorial@wolfs.cc. Contributions can be sent to 3803 Walnut Ave, Concord, CA, 94519.


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