



[LB Worrilow Makes Sacrifice to Help Stranger](#)

November 28, 2013/in [Jay's Blog](#) /by [Jay Adams](#)

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He sat in a white, sterile room, arms splayed out in front of him, unable to move, his veins punctured by needles as tubes ran straight out of one arm, curled around and around and into a machine before another set of tubes would curl around and around on the way back to his other arm.

Through the lengthy network of clear pipeline he watched as bright crimson life ran out and back into him — a sign of hope for a woman he had never met before.

The hum of the machine was constant in the room, its motor whirring while separating out peripheral blood stem cells — and moment by moment, working to give a new life to a woman without a face, a story, a name.

His mind wanders as his blood washes into the machine and back into his arm. She's out there somewhere, and she had been waiting a long time for Worrilow to come along.

Years later, he thinks about her often. Her image is created only in his imagination, but the affect his sacrifice might have on her is as real as the blood that drained from his body.

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He doesn't know where she is or if she even survived. She might have gone on to do something great, or she might still be working toward that, with dreams that still exist because of him.

Wherever she is, whoever she is, Paul Worrilow may have saved her.

The Delaware Blue Hens, Worrilow's college team, had a cause away from the field. It was one most players were unfamiliar with but extremely willing to support.

Then-head coach K.C. Keeler spearheaded a bone marrow drive his football team would end up running every year with the [Be the Match Foundation](#) in an effort to get more people matched up with leukemia and lymphoma patients who could use life-saving donations.

The team would spend a whole day recruiting people on Delaware's campus to get registered, give a saliva sample and have their names added to a list. That list, according to the results of the saliva test, would then determine if a match was out there.

It was a no-brainer for the football team to participate and register, adding their names to a list their head coach was an adamant supporter of. After all, it was just a list. What were the chances of actually being a match for some total stranger?

“When you do it, you do it because it's a good thing,” Worrilow, the Atlanta Falcons undrafted rookie linebacker, said. “But you do possibly have a chance to help somebody. But at the same time, I've never, and I don't know anyone that's ever, done it before. You join knowing that if you do get called upon — you signed up for it. It's your duty to help any way you can.”

Once Worrilow's name was added to the list and his information put into the database, the phone rang.

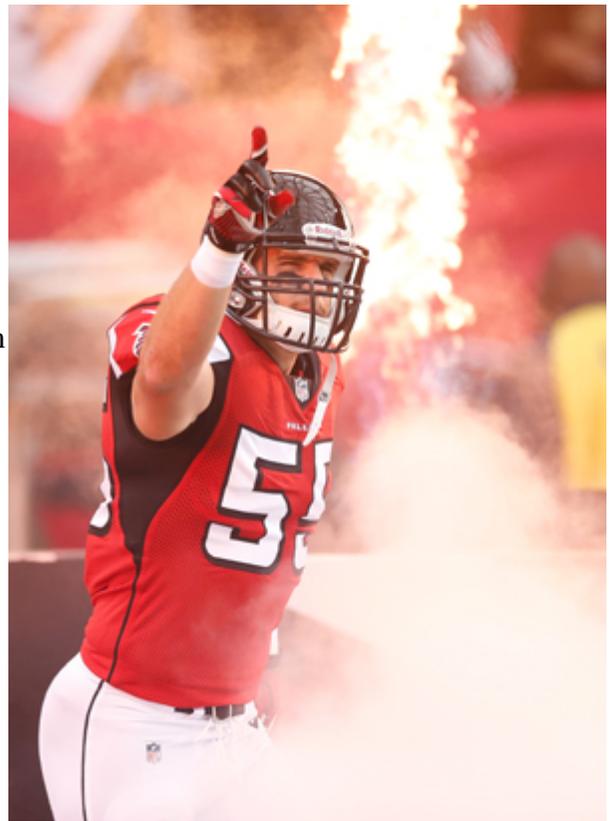
On the other end was a chance to help — a chance that started as a probability that measured less than one percent.

He had been matched with a woman with leukemia — such an uncommon thing for non-relatives that Worrilow could hardly believe it. According to BeTheMatch.org, only 1 in 540 non-relative registry members will go on to donate bone marrow or peripheral blood stem cells to a patient in need.

There was no going back, but there was also never a consideration not to. Worrilow immediately went into the process of getting himself prepared for the peripheral blood stem cell donation.

Paperwork had to be filled out. Drugs that increased the number of stem cells in his body had to be administered for weeks before the procedure. Then, it was time to sit in that room and literally watch the life run out of his body, into that machine and back into him.

He couldn't move. Moving would cause problems with the machine and the procedure to the point where it would stop and start up again. For hours, he sat there, listening to the machine hum and whir, reflecting on his life and the one he was helping.



“I remember it was a pretty long day,” Worrilow said of the six-hour procedure to remove the stem cells from his blood for the donation. “The nursing staff and everyone there back in Wilmington, (Delaware) at Christiana Hospital, they have their own section that does specifically this procedure for this foundation. They were awesome. It was a good day.”

In the days after the procedure, Worrilow felt the side effects — weakness, aches — but nothing compared to what the woman he was helping was going through.

Throughout the process, from the moment he got the call to inform him that he was a match, he put himself in the place of a family member of someone suffering with leukemia.

How do they feel? How heavy is the hopelessness they hold? What's the desperation like, waiting to find a match? All thoughts he couldn't bear to have weighing on him if he didn't participate in the donation.

“I think when you sign up for it, you're committing yourself,” he said. “So to back out at that point when you actually do match somebody, I think that would be an awful thing to do. I don't know how frequent they can find matches that fast. So at that point, you're already committed. I feel like you've got to do it.”

The person off the field is a sign of the person on it. That's a philosophy the Falcons organization, under general manager Thomas Dimitroff and head coach Mike Smith, has fully subscribed to.

During the spring months, as the NFL Draft approaches, the word “character” gets thrown about, as if it's some tangible measurement of a player's ability. But the word itself, and the embodiment of it, is so important to the Falcons — an organization that prides itself on giving back when called to.

In the locker room, character makes a man you want to go to battle with. It makes for a solid locker room where players hold each other accountable in a sport that demands it.

The actions off the field can predict what a player will bring to a sport where each of the 53 roster spots are precious and the balance is often struck in the details of each man on it.

“It talks about dependability — that you can really depend on someone. You can really depend on someone that does something for a person that he doesn’t even know,” Smith said. “It magnifies what you’re looking for. You want to have a team member that’s going to sacrifice and do what he has to do make the team better, and Paul has done that since he’s been here.”

Worrilow’s teammates have noticed. Most of them, however, are unaware of the sacrifice he made not so long ago.

When they learn of his act, it makes total sense to them. From his humility in the locker room to his meteoric rise from undrafted rookie trying to make the roster to [record-setter in midseason](#), it all comes together on the field as there’s an almost natural trust of him.

“It speaks volumes to what type of person he is. I had no idea that even happened,” said veteran linebacker Sean Weatherspoon, whose locker sits right across from Worrilow’s in Flowery Branch. “It speaks a lot about his character. He’s a special guy.”

Worrilow said he’s never thought about that connection before — that his selfless donation could translate to a positive in an NFL locker room. He just considers himself blessed to be playing football at this point, a Delaware product that didn’t receive a contract offer from any other team the moment the 2013 NFL Draft concluded.

He thinks about her a lot, though.

In random times, when he’s by himself, she’ll cross his mind. Most donations are done anonymously, but donors and recipients have a choice to break that anonymity. Worrilow and his recipient opted to stay behind that veil.

He thinks it’d be nice to meet her one day. To find out her story. To put a face with the thought. To know if she’s OK.

The act itself was not about that.

Instead, it starts and ends for Worrilow with a life that could be saved through a simple act of humanity.

“You know, that’s the way I like to think of things,” he said. “If someone had a chance to do this for me or someone close to me, I would pray that would happen. It’s cancer; it’s such an awful thing in this world today. I keep her in my prayers and think about her all the time.

“The opportunity arose where someone needed help and you just do it.”

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