

Mikail R. Russo
(More Opportunities for NEighborhood Youth)
MONEY Athletic Foundation
2006 Annual Newsletter

A Retrospective . . .
Five Years and
Running

It is difficult to believe that the **MONEY** Athletic Foundation has been in existence for over five years. This causes one to pause and reflect for various reasons. It requires one to look not only at where it began, where it has been, and where it is going, but to ponder the whys as well. Since this is a memorial foundation, it would be unforgivable to begin without honoring the individual whose sense of community and generosity inspired the organization's founding.

Most of you reading this newsletter knew Mikail or knew of him. That is why you have supported the Foundation over the past five years. For those of you unfortunate enough to have only known him peripherally please allow us to reintroduce our personal inspiration.

That Mikail was a fine athlete cannot be denied, but that is only a small part of the whole. What made Mikail stand out was his spirit. It was a kind, generous, fun-loving spirit that would rather give than receive. He constantly showed this in multiple ways. Whether it was by making the extra pass so a teammate could score, or by alleviating tension by cracking a joke, Mikail always wanted the best for those around him. That is why the **MONEY** Athletic Foundation began; it is why it still carries on.

It is by the dedication of its sponsors --kind, generous,

fun-loving people like you--that it succeeds. Thank you for your support. Thank you for allowing Mikail's spirit to thrive through your benevolence.

The accomplishments of the Foundation are many. This is truly amazing considering its simple beginnings. In the late fall of 2001 it was crucial for Mikail's family and friends to honor his memory. The idea to create an organization that would help others was universally accepted, but the



means to fashion it were debated. The Board was quickly formed and ideas were bantered freely. All wanted the enterprise to be a success, so care was taken not to attempt the unachievable. Therefore, the Board looked to Mikail's life for inspiration. Sports were one way Mikail expressed himself. Success in sports requires skill and discipline, but even with both, some children are not given the same opportunities to achieve success. The Board decided to focus on helping deserving kids who couldn't afford camps or equipment. In other words, to attempt to level the playing field for all.

Once this was decided, the next step was to figure out the best way to raise money. Again, the Board looked to Mikail for inspiration. One of the activities he loved was playing home run derby with family and friends. The local little league field was sometimes used for these impulsive games, but the backyard of his Pearl Street home (with its cedar hedge green monster) was the host of many. In each gathering, there was a spirit of supportive competition and camaraderie. Special pitches, erratic swings, shattered balls, and enthusiastic screams filled the air. The recollection of the delight these backyard derbies elicited was the impetus for the Board to recreate that spirit in its annual fundraiser.

As of the writing of this newsletter, **MONEY** has given over \$50,000 to deserving individuals and teams. The five fundraisers, the Annual Home Run Derbies, held on or near Memorial Day Weekend, have raised over \$34,000. The success of this event is due to committed athletes and the event's committed sponsors. The rest of the funds have come from quiet supporters, like those of you reading this newsletter, who make it a point to honor this spirit of giving.

During the past five years, over 176 individuals have been given scholarships to camps or funds to cover necessary equipment. In addition, 17 different local teams have benefited. Each of these teams included at least ten athletes and needed assistance for uniforms, travel, or dues. Thus, Mikail's spirit thrives.

May your New Year be filled with kindness, warmth, and love!

Thoughts from the President

At this five year anniversary, the true origins of the MONEY Athletic Foundation have officially reached that age when kids start to board the big yellow bus and leave home for school for the very first time. I think that this is a fitting metaphor for our Foundation. Family, community, and the enduring strength of connections formed by the Foundation's namesake have nurtured the organization through its infancy. The result is a relevant charity that is ready to make additional strides in maturity, sophistication, and growth. We are confident that our Foundation will continue to thrive as children, who never had the pleasure of being around when Mikail was here, enjoy the benefits of his legacy.

It is this legacy that remains important for us to reflect on even as we plan our future. Mikail was a great person to be around. That may seem like a simple and inelegant statement, but I urge you to consider the context. Before I reached my "mature" twenty-something thoughts and perceptions, I was a teenage boy who was five years older than his little brother. Regardless of the age gap, Mikail's energy, humor, and emphasis on the happiness of the group over his own were transcendent. For every story of rummaging through his older brother's (probably very messy) room to find an autographed baseball to play catch with and subsequently lose, there are many more memories of wonderful times on the golf course, baseball diamond, soccer pitch, basketball court, ping pong table, and, of course, the

backyard wiffleball field (it may have also helped ease the pain that the autographed baseball in question was of a pitcher who figured prominently in a World Series defeat of our beloved Red Sox some decades before). I certainly did not go easy on Mikail when we played. He always had a sweeter jump shot, better bat speed, and that flawless golf swing. My advantage was size, and Mikail knew that I was not afraid to use it. Despite this, he was the one person who could always be counted on to join a game, and lift my spirits. Mikail mastered the art of making others around him feel great about themselves.

Mikail probably watched too many replays of European soccer matches on TV. You may have actually witnessed one of the manifestations of this passion if you ever saw Mikail play soccer. Let's just say that he was not always the quickest person to get back on his feet after one of his many tumbles to the ground. Regardless, he always seemed to fight through the "pain" and play the game with that memorable smile on his face within minutes. But Mikail shared more than just dramatic indulgence with the figures that we would sometimes get to watch as we eschewed the more conventional Saturday morning cartoons. He radiated an infectious joie de vivre (my visits to Paris have finally paid off) and an insatiable drive to make friends out of strangers uncommon on this side of the Atlantic. It is this quality, which made him amazing in life, that continues to connect the people he has touched with the organization bearing his name.

Five years creates a great opportunity to evaluate the values that guide our organization. I feel that they are as relevant today as they were when we first created the MONEY Athletic Foundation. As we continue to grow, evolve, and leave that yellow bus behind, they are the principles that will continue to define our organization. Thank you for your support of these standards, and our memories. Mikail's spirit continues to live on through your efforts and generosity.

Keagan

Scholarship Athletes Highlighted

Both Kallie Aldus, 2006 Miss Maine Field Hockey, and her teammate, Brittney Cummings, from Belfast Area High School are past recipients of MONEY awards. The Foundation was able to help these girls, throughout their high school careers, to participate in National Futures Tournaments, University Camps, and Olympic Development Tours. These events were held in Maine, the Eastern Coast, and Amsterdam.

Kallie describes her Amsterdam experience best: "Not only did I learn a lot about hockey but I learned about the Dutch culture and met many new people. The atmosphere over there was a lot different than in the United States in many ways, the food, transportation (everyone biked), education and how the kids were raised. It was a once in a lifetime experience and I had a great time. Once again, thank you for supporting me, because without you I wouldn't have been able to go."

PLEASE CONTINUE TO HELP LOCAL YOUTH SUCCEED

The address to send your tax-deductible dollars to is:

MONEY Athletic Foundation

50 Bull Hill Rd.

Hope, ME 04847

*For more information on the Foundation and on past Home Run Derbies
please visit: www.moneyathleticfoundation.org*