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Missouri Tigers swim team copes with tragedy

ANDREW ASTLEFORD

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ARCHIVE | EMAIL

Andrew Astleford has written for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, Indianapolis Star, The Washington Post, The Orlando Sentinel and FOX Sports Midwest. His work has been recognized by the Associated Press Sports Editors, Hearst Foundation and Society of Professional Journalists.

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July 8, 2011

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Former teammates remembered a smile that gave them joy. Some fought back tears, embraced and wondered why an unseen enemy stole a friend.

They came to honor and reflect. They also were presented a mission: Prevent something similar from happening again.

Friends, family and members of the Missouri women's swimming team gathered July 6 at St. Thomas More Newman Center to remember Sasha Menu Courey, a Missouri swimmer who committed suicide June 17 in a hospital near Boston after battling borderline personality disorder — a condition that involves unstable behavior and mood swings. She was 20.

Menu Courey struggled with severe depression. A number of personal-life setbacks, as well as back injuries sustained last summer that kept her from competing most of the past season, worsened her situation.


As memories of Menu Courey in happier times were shared, a call from the Rev. Thomas Saucier served as the memorial's lasting message.

"For those who knew her and loved her, I believe that we — because of her story — have two missions: One, work to remove the stigma of mental illness so that others like Sasha may seek help sooner," he said. "Unfortunately, as a society, we are still burdened with that stigma which prevents so many from seeking help.

"Secondly, I think we have to reach out and be that listening ear, whether it be a teammate or a classmate, and reach out sooner."

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates borderline personality disorder affects 2 percent of

PHOTO GALLERY



TRULYA GIFT
Photos of Sasha Menu Courey, whose life ended entirely too soon after a long battle with depression.



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GAME SCHEDULE

adults, mostly young women. The condition includes bouts with anger, depression and anxiety. People affected sometimes can view themselves as unworthy in the world.

The setting was a sad reminder of the world Menu Courey will miss. Outside the center, students walked the University of Missouri campus. Menu Courey, a sophomore at the time of her death, was ineligible to compete as a freshman because of paperwork problems. But she was thought to be a key contributor last season until she sustained two herniated discs and a hairline vertebrae fracture in training.

Still, she was full of promise. The psychology major from Toronto had hoped to become a psychologist and humanitarian aid worker after graduation. She earned a 4.0 GPA her first semester and was named to the dean's list.

Her heart for others was evident. Testimonials at the service celebrated her ability to impact lives.

Assistant coach Patrick Rowan called coaching Menu Courey "truly a gift." He said watching Menu Courey taught him that what happens in the pool doesn't matter as much as touching the lives of people outside it.

"I was so blessed to have had the opportunity to have Sasha in my life," Rowan said, his voice cracking. "She will be missed greatly."

Others will miss her, too. Former teammate Mary Sheahen spoke about Menu Courey's kind demeanor. Caitlin Connor, another former teammate, spoke about Menu Courey's selfless personality.

Former teammate Ashley Paterson spoke about how Menu Courey found delight in unexpected places. Paterson remembers walking with Menu Courey in downtown Columbia one fall. Leaves were scattered on their path.

Suddenly, Menu Courey paused. She picked up a leaf that was larger than the rest, one about the size of a small dinner plate. Menu Courey laughed and jumped in excitement.

Paterson recalls the scene as an example of how Menu Courey approached the world: always searching for something special.

"Sasha was able to pick out the best qualities about everyone, including someone she just met," Paterson said.

Paterson's story was one of many shared. After the service, guests gathered near an exit. Some signed a memory book. There was mostly silence.

There was sadness for what was lost. There was a call never to let it happen again.

"We cannot allow a friend to go down a self-destructive path," Saucier said. "We have to reach out and get involved."

Donations are being accepted for the Sasha Menu Courey Fund. More information can be found at www.mshfoundation.ca/fonds-sashamenucourey or by calling 416-586-8203.

Tags: University of Missouri, Missouri Tigers, Toronto, Swimming, Sasha Menu Courey, Depression

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pressure

11:19 pm Jul 14, 2011

Pressure to perform...some people are harder on themselves than others...harder on themselves

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COMMUNITY POLL

Stan Musial

What is most impressive about Hall of Famer Stan Musial's career?

- : 24-time All-Star
- : 3-time NL MVP
- : 7-time NL batting champ
- : First ballot Hall of Famer (1969)
- : Career .331 batting avg.
- : Presidential Medal of Freedom

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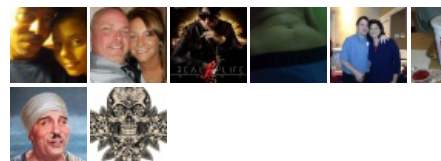


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than they should be. This is so sad. It's without question she was suffering an illness. It's also without question she was loved. I pray for healing for those left behind. This is so sad.

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billstewart73

Missouri Tigers swim team copes with tragedy

9:41 pm Jul 14, 2011

The sad truth behind mental disorders is that in more cases than not neither counseling nor drug therapy regimes work for the most severe of cases.

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