

2005 Tournament Dedication... Sam Chilcott



So I'm sitting here, just hanging out on a beautiful summer day. I should probably be practicing for the horseshoe tournaments I have coming up, but I suppose that can wait just a little while. I remember sitting in this same exact chair almost a year ago when my phone rang. I answered it and it was my dad with the worst possible news... Sam was in the hospital and hurt badly. At that time I didn't have a car, so I just started running to the hospital. Luckily, half way there, I managed to catch a ride, and when I finally got there it hit me that this was really serious.

With little else to do just sitting there in the hospital waiting area, I naturally began reflecting back on Sam, and what it was like to be with him. Here's one thing I remembered at the time that has stuck with me since...

Sam and I were pitching together at the Glenwood courts, and we were not really practicing of course, but rather messing around playing this game we called "High Toss." You'll probably see Aaron Dorler, John Perry, and I playing it at some point this weekend; it's something we all did together.

So, Sam and I were playing high toss, and a car drove by blasting Margaritaville by Jimmy Buffet. Now, neither of us were singers... I know, that's hard to believe, but it's true. In fact, we were TERRIBLE! But have you ever just had the urge to sing? Well, we did. And in unison, we broke out into the chorus of Margaritaville. It was one of those moments that you never forget: a moment of pure joy. I don't think anyone heard us ...and that's probably a good thing! But that's what it was like all the time with Sam --pure joy. Somehow, he could always turn absolutely nothing into something worth remembering and that's what I'll always remember and cherish most about him.

That's just one of a hundred little stories just like it that I have, and I know I'm not alone. I'm sure that anyone who ever met Sam has a "Sam story." He was one of those people that just made an impression on everyone. For example, at last year's Eastern Nationals, we had a very special person throw out the first pitch of the tournament, a young man from the Make a Wish Foundation named Andrew McCallion. Sam met Andrew and did what he did best: made friends. Sam introduced himself and took Andrew aside for some pitching lessons before he went out for the big first pitch. And I'd say that Sam should have been a horseshoe coach, because in just five minutes of instruction, Andrew was only a hair away from making a ringer in front of that whole crowd! You might say it was a lucky shot, but I wouldn't. I'd say that in five minutes, Sam found a way to relate to Andrew, make friends, and make a horseshoe pitcher out of him... Once again, Sam made his impression. Andrew was just as distraught as anyone about the news of Sam's tragedy... You didn't have to know him for years to feel like you've been friends with him for years... that feeling came almost instantly with Sam... He had an amazing gift in that way.

Everyone makes a first impression when they meet you, but it takes a really special person to make an impression on you every time you see them. Once again, Sam was that person. My dad has a couple "Sam stories" just like the rest of us...

"It was about two or three days before the Eastern National Tournament last year when we got word that there were a whole bunch of loose stakes at the courts... Rod and Sam happened to be sitting in our office late that afternoon when we got the call... there were more than twenty

stakes loose! We were swamped with work at our shop and so Rod and Sam volunteered to go over and check it all out... We finished up work a couple hours later and by the time we got over to the courts, Rod and Sam together had devised a very simple and effective way to tighten the stakes. I was really impressed because I had no idea what we were going to do to fix such a huge problem and it was quite a relief to not have to worry about it. Well, a couple of other guys were there turning and watering courts... as we were uncovering each court to check the stakes, we could clearly see that just about every end also needed to be turned and watered very badly. Before I could even think about it, Sam had all the stakes that needed fixing dug out and ready for repair Rod was following behind with the parts to tighten the stakes and that part of the project was done almost instantly... Well, Sam must have really loved to dig because on his own, he went right from that into digging up all the dry courts... I was doing the same thing and I'd bet he did three ends to my one and on top of that, every time I got near him, he'd leave his court and come over and help me with mine. I actually thought that he had to be cutting corners, so when he wasn't looking, I snuck over to inspect a court he had just done... it looked better than mine, so I just privately thanked God for the help! It was awesome! Seriously, I had never seen anyone his age work like that before... He put us all to shame and I'll never forget it... The courts will probably never be that nice again.

A couple days later, during the tournament, I was standing off to the side of things on the asphalt walkway near the courts... It was late in the day on Saturday of the Eastern Nationals, 2004... I was talking to my Aunt Debby who had come by to check out the action of the tournament when a group of kids walked by... Sam was in the middle of the group, laughing and joking with the kids... he was carrying an open bag of potato chips and as he was going by, he looked over at me and smiled and broke away from the group (I must have looked starved or something, which I was!) and walked right up to me and held out the bag and said here... take some... Trying to be polite, I said, "no thanks..." but Sam totally insisted... He said, "Come on... I know you want some... they're salt & vinegar... you gotta have some!" so then I reached in and grabbed a couple... Well that didn't satisfy Sam at all! So, he then just proceeded to pour a large part of the bag out on the bleacher seat next to me... there was no stopping him... I said thanks and he just went on his way like it was nothing... I really did want more of the chips and he must have picked up on that and honestly, he was right... they were really, really good! I hadn't eaten a thing all day long and they totally hit the spot. It was just what I needed at that moment and it was so typical of Sam... he could have just stayed in his little group and kept walking by like most kids would have... No, not Sam! Ever since then, that's all I think about when I eat salt & vinegar potato chips. There have even been a few times when I've specifically bought them so I could remember that moment and that feeling I got that day from Sam... He always seemed to go out of his way for everyone, even when there was no reason to and that's the way I'll always remember him. I could probably write pages of these little things about Sam... Every encounter with him was like that for me and I'm sure, for everyone else too..."

These are just four of a thousand or more stories that could be told about Sam. Like I said earlier, he was one of those people that could turn absolutely nothing into something worth remembering... God, I loved that kid!

I love Pink Floyd; they're my favorite band ever. And I have stated before and I maintain that you can relate anything to Pink Floyd in some way, either with lyrics or with the music. And I can relate everyone's feelings about Sam in one line...

How I wish, how I wish you were here!

--Tony White