



# GOOSE CREEK

## CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Bret and Brenda Boyd

## Selfless sacrifice

### GCM coach's kidney could provide better life for younger brother

By ROBBIE MAGNESS

Aside from a love for coaching football and the fact that they share a couple of parents, Bret Boyd and his brother, Brad Boyd, are not alike at all. Or so it would seem.

Bret, 48, is quiet, humble, modest, stoic. Brad, 14 years younger than Bret, is talkative and funny. Bret, the current campus athletic coordinator and head football coach at Goose Creek Memorial High School, is the picture of health. Brad, who is stepping down from the head football coach position at Hillsboro High School, has not been so lucky.

Over the past year, Brad has reached the end stages of an autoimmune disease that can lead to the complete shutdown of the kidneys. The choices left to him were few: dialysis for the rest of his life or a kidney transplant.

While outward appearance would indicate the brothers are not alike at all, where they did turn out to be alike is on the inside.

#### Chasing opportunity

Bret Boyd graduated from Kerrville High School, then attended Navarro College and Texas A&I (now Texas A&M-Kingsville). He met his future wife, Brenda, during their freshman year at Navarro College in 1979. She was a basketball player, and he played football. They were married in 1982, while still in college.

Bret was a coach at McKinney High School for eight years, then took his first head coaching job at Brookshire Royal High School. He stayed there two years.

Bret's dad, Bob Boyd, was coaching at the University of Texas, but he left to become the head coach at Harlingen High School. Brad was starting his senior year at Harlingen, and Bret left Brookshire Royal to be an assistant coach for his dad.

"That was a great opportunity," Bret said, "to be able to coach my brother his senior year in high school. Not many people get a chance to do that."



Brad Boyd

Bret served as offense coordinator for the team and also was the school's head track coach. Eventually, Bob moved on, and Bret took over the Harlingen program.

However, Brenda's father developed some health problems, and Bret took over the head coaching job at Killeen in order to be closer to him. Seven years went by, and Brenda's father regained his health. Last year, Bret found himself faced with an opportunity to come to Baytown and start up Goose Creek Memorial's brand new program.

"My dad had opened a new program at Sugar Land Clements," Bret said, "and he said it was great to be able to do that, and that's a big part of the reason why we came here."

Little did Bret know that he would face a much more difficult decision during his 26th year overall in coaching.

#### Surprising diagnosis

In the meantime, Brad, now 34, was following his own path after graduating from Harlingen. He played football for two years under head coach Dennis Franchione at New Mexico. He eventually transferred to Hardin-Simmons University. After using up his eligibility, Brad applied for a medical redshirt year.

When he went for his physical exam during his final year at Hardin-Simmons, the doctors noticed he suddenly had high blood pressure. Some tests were done, and he was cleared to play. However, follow-up on the tests showed the presence of a kidney disease known as IgA nephropathy, sometimes called Berger's disease.

According to the National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse, "IgA nephropathy is a kidney disorder that occurs when IgA — a protein that helps the body fight infections — settles in the kidneys."

"There's no known cause," Brenda said. "It's not genetic. There is not one thing you can pinpoint and say, 'That's what caused it.'"

Bret said one theory emerged, one with frightening implications for coaches everywhere.

"Brad's case could have been the result of severe dehydration," Bret said, "probably from his football-playing days."

The diagnosis occurred 10 years ago, and Brad was told at that time that he might need a kidney transplant one day. He has been tested every year, and doctors said it would be time to start the process when his kidney function dropped below 20 percent. That happened six months ago, late in 2008.

"This past year, we knew his kidney function was down," Brenda said. "We knew this transplant might be coming about at some time, but we did not know how serious his situation had become. Then, Leslie (Brad's wife) contacted us. 'If you would like to complete an application to be a donor,' she told us, 'Brad's now on the donor list.' Up to that point, they had been kind of private about it."

#### Applying to help

Bret immediately began the application process, as did their sister, Terri, 45, a teacher and coach now living in Midland. Their parents, Marihelen and Bob Boyd, also applied, despite knowing they would probably be ineligible. If Bret had not been a match for the operation, Terri would have most likely been the one now preparing to undergo surgery.

Bret had six vials of blood drawn, to compare to Brad's. Every person carries six pathogens in his or her blood, three from each parent. It turned out the first three matched, then the fourth and fifth. Then, the sixth.

"We were a six-for-six match," Bret said. "That rarely happens, except among siblings, and even then, the chances of it happening are not very good."

The match launched a tense, not to mention expensive, round of testing in Dallas, where doctors looked for any reason why Bret should be excluded from donating.

"If anything red flags," Bret said, "then immediately, it is stopped. It cost us about \$12,000 to \$15,000, but in the end, they determined I was healthy and physically able to be a donor."

One final hurdle remained. A committee of surgeons, transplant specialists, psychiatrists and others convened to review and discuss the case.

"They called us back," Bret said, "and gave us the news: 'You're eligible.'"

The next step was simply a matter of finding dates when the surgical team and facilities, donor and recipient were all available. Bret and Brad agreed that they wanted to do the procedure as quickly as possible.

Brad has been the head coach at Hillsboro High School for the past couple of years, but he is relocating this summer, possibly to a Houston-area school.

"We wanted to do it right when school was out," Bret said. "That would give Brad six weeks to recuperate before starting his new job in August."

### **A week of worry**

Fellow teachers and staff at GCM surprised Bret with a cooler full of gifts and well wishes on Friday. Bret reacted in his humble, modest way, thanking those gathered for their kindness.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," he said, partly in the direction of GCM principal AI Richard.

"You don't come back here until you're ready," Richard responded, only half-jokingly. He gestured at three puzzle books among the gift package. "You can't come back until all three of those are completely done."

Bret and Brenda departed from Baytown later Friday afternoon for the Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

"On Monday, we will meet with the surgeon and do some pre-op," Bret said, "then I will stay for a day of monitoring."

Thursday, the transplant procedure begins. Bret will go into surgery at 6:30 a.m., and Brad will follow about an hour later.

"It's just a week away," Brad said, "and it's just starting to sink in that it is about to happen. To be honest, though, I am ready to get it over with."

For Bret, doctors will make several small incisions, then work arthroscopically to detach his left kidney. Eventually, a four-inch incision will be made near his left hip, where his kidney will be removed.

The kidney will remain outside of a body for only about 30 minutes before a second team of doctors will insert it into Brad.

"We found it interesting that they will not remove Brad's existing kidneys," Bret said. "Instead, they will place mine into his pelvic socket and then attach it."

Anticipation has been the toughest part for Bret.

"The closer it gets, the more I wish it would get here quicker. My mentality is, let's get it done. But honestly, I have not had many negative thoughts cross my mind. I'm very comfortable with doing this."

Bret said the week will probably be harder on Brenda than him. "She has handled it fine so far," he said, then added with a grin, "Next week, though, she'll probably be a nervous wreck."

When told what Bret had said, Brenda laughed and nodded, knowing it to be true. "I have to be strong," she said. "I have to stay positive for him. I want to take care of him."

### **After the surgery**

The complete match between the brothers improves the odds of a successful transplant.

"Doctors were excited to find that out," Brad said. "They have high expectations because of that."

The quick response also helps.

"Brad has not gone on dialysis, although it is getting close to that," Bret said. "Once a person goes on dialysis, the percentage of a transplant being successful drops each year."

The latest round of testing indicates Brad's kidney function has dropped below 10 percent.

If all goes well for Bret, he will leave the hospital late Saturday or early Sunday. He will have some standard limitations for a few weeks: no heavy lifting, no golf. Then, life should return to normal, with one exception.

He will be tested yearly to verify that his remaining kidney is functioning well. If he ever needs a kidney transplant, as a donor, he would automatically move to the top of the waiting list.

"They say my remaining kidney will typically grow to take over some of the workload," Bret said. "It can grow up to 30 or 40 percent."

For Brad, a wide spectrum of results exists. Assuming the kidney functions well, Brad could awaken from surgery already feeling "100 percent better," Bret said. Still, his recovery will take at least six weeks. He will live at an apartment complex next to the hospital, which is reserved for transplant donors and recipients.

Doctors are hoping that Brad will be able to stop taking some of the more than 15 prescription medications he currently needs.

"We're hoping he can get off all of them," Bret said. "But if not, there's no real choice: He'll have to live with that."

Brad and Leslie, who is a high school athletic trainer, have young children: Brooke, 4, and Brody, 1. Brad said the children have not been aware of his condition, but in Brooke's case, he knows that will change somewhat.

"I'm sure there will have to be some explaining at that time with my daughter," Brad said. "After surgery, I will be in ICU (intensive care unit), and she won't see me for awhile."

The surgery will require doctors to shut down Brad's immune system, in order to keep his body from rejecting the donated organ. Because of that, he will wear a mask for several weeks and take precautions to avoid exposure to any illness.

"That will be the hard part, why I can't be around her (Brooke)," Brad said. "She's intelligent, so there will have to be some explanation."

### **A proud family**

When Brad knew he needed a donor, he did not want to put any pressure on his family members to apply. But deep down, he knew they would be there for him.

"My family has always been givers," Brad said. "But I realize this is the ultimate gift that he's giving. All of my family members wanted to do the same."

"I never had a doubt my family would go and get checked to see if they could donate. I'm proud to say I'm a Boyd."

Bret and Brenda have two children of their own to think about, but luckily, they are both grown. Brandi, 26, teaches English and coaches cheerleaders at San Antonio Madison High School, and Beau, 22, is a junior at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

The couple said any misgivings they had about the procedure were allayed quickly.

"When I was first told that Brad needed a donor," Bret said, "I remember kind of, deep down, thinking, I hope it's not me. But the education we received when we went up to Baylor Medical was unbelievable. We were sitting there in a room full of transplant recipients, and they are all living perfectly normal lives."

Bret said Brenda was nervous at first, but she came around, especially after visiting Baylor Medical.

"It was simply amazing what we learned up there," Brenda said. "Our big fear was for Bret's own health. But after that training we went through, we felt like, let's get this done."

Bret agreed: "If it came up now," he said, "I think there is no doubt that Brenda would do it for any of her sisters."

But it is Bret who, circumstances as they are, is the perfect match for the brother who is so different. And for Brenda, she will stay by Bret's side through it all.

"I've always had a lot of respect for him," Brenda said, "because he has always been the kind of person who does things right. And I have a whole new respect for him because he's doing this."

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Goose Creek Consolidated  
Independent School District  
4544 Interstate 10 East  
Baytown, Texas 77521  
281.420.4800

Mailing Address:  
Goose Creek Consolidated  
Independent School District  
P.O. Box 30  
Baytown, Texas 77522  
281.420.4800

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