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Big loss for LHS family

By Kevin Eckleberry - Sports Editor

The man his teammates affectionately called "Big Skinny" was just getting started.

But Kendall Thomas, who played offensive line for the LaGrange Grangers earlier this decade, is gone at the age of 23.

Thomas collapsed a few weeks ago and had been on a respirator, and he lost the fight on Sunday.

"If he was alive, he'd probably be out here today," LaGrange head coach Steve Pardue said following Wednesday's practice session.

Football was a huge part of Thomas' life.

He was a member of the state championship team in 2001, and he was a senior in 2002 when he used his 350-pound frame to block for quarterback Blake Mitchell and running back Skyler Thornton.

During Thomas' senior season, he was joined on the team by two of his brothers - DeBrandon Harris and DeMoreo Ford.

"That family has been a big part of (LaGrange football)," Pardue said. "His senior year, it was he and his two brothers. And (former LaGrange and NFL wide receiver) Quentin McCord is his uncle. I've known that family since I've been here."

Ford, a senior wide receiver at the University of Kentucky, has taken some time away from preseason practice to be with his family this week.

During Friday's preseason scrimmage against Westlake at Callaway Stadium, Pardue said Thomas will be remembered.

The extent of Thomas' popularity can be found at a Web site devoted to Granger football - www.lagrangefootball.com

A guest book has been set up where people can leave their thoughts about Thomas, and as of Thursday morning nearly 80 people had signed in.

The posts carry a common thread, that of a young man who was warm, funny, kind and a superb teammate.

Josh Strother came into the program when Thomas was a senior, and he said "Skinny was a guy that could always bring a smile on everyone's faces. I had the pleasure of playing football with him as a freshman and he made me feel right at home. I will always be thankful for the memories and laughs I shared with him."

Janet Greer was one of Thomas' teachers, and she remembers Thomas "for his smile, his kindness, his manners, and his hard work both in the classroom and on the field."

Jake Strother, who like Thomas was a senior Granger in 2002, said "the strong bond I have with you through football and the years since won't fade even though now that you are away from us. May your soul find rest with Christ Jesus. And I pray the Lord is with your family, comforting them in this hard time. You had a big heart for others, and that'll be missed."

Former Granger Mario Dixon, who graduated earlier this spring, said "you may be gone, but you'll never be forgotten."