

Sunday, November 30

Fiedler Shows Heroics off the Field

By Joe Schad, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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BOCA RATON -- The little girl approached the quarterback signing autographs and handed over a white bag stuffed with about \$40, money she had raised.

The quarterback was Jay Fiedler, and for 8-year-old Sabrina Santos, this neighborhood collection was personal. Santos has cystic fibrosis, a terminal disease characterized by the production of mucus that facilitates infections.

Fiedler, signing autographs at a jewelry store on Saturday evening, could not believe what he was handed after about two hours of signing footballs and jerseys.

"It's heartwarming," said Fiedler, whose Reach for the Stars Foundation raises money to help CF-affected families deal with financial and psychological burdens. "At times we live in a very greedy society. To see a child like that giving of herself really warms your heart."

Fiedler has much to be appreciative of these days, including the starting position he regained in a dramatic Dolphins' victory against Washington last Sunday and then solidified with a Thanksgiving win against Dallas.

Trailing Washington by 13 points at home, running backs coach Joel Collier relayed a message from coach Dave Wannstedt for Fiedler to get ready.

"I was prepared," Fiedler said. "I was ready to go. I was relaxed. I did a lot of studying on Washington, knowing I would be the backup. I was ready to win."

More than 500 people had something autographed by Fiedler, despite the tucked-away strip mall location of Raymond Lee Jewelers, which will donate 25 percent of holiday purchases to Reach for the Stars.

"Fiedler's tough," said Luigi Rotondi, a 19-year-old from Boca Raton. "I've always been a big fan because of his leadership. He's got this tenacity. And he's got heart."

"I like him because of how smart he is," said Mary Jane Switzer of Lighthouse Point. "He doesn't throw stupid passes like that other quarterback."

After leading consecutive victories, Fiedler is a fan favorite again.

But he knows that may not last forever.

"If I could tell all Dolphins fans something, it's that we're busting our butts out there every day to try to get wins," Fiedler said. "We're doing our best, as much as we can, whatever it takes, to take this team to where it wants to go, to where we want it to go and to where the fans want it to go."

With that in mind, Fiedler said he improved in the four weeks he was injured.

"One of Brian Griese's strengths was his release back there in the pocket, and having a quick release down there was one of the things I tried working on," Fiedler said.

"Sometimes as a season goes along, your mechanics start fading a little bit, you don't think about them a little bit. I wasn't able to drop back in practice, so I worked on things I could, like throwing the football, working on the quick release, trying to refine my game fundamentally as much as I can."

It's worked. In the past two games, Fielder has completed 21-of-30 passes for 278 yards with three touchdowns and no interceptions.

Fielder, who is 34-15 as a starting quarterback, said one emotion drives him.

"I fear failure," Fiedler said.

For the family of Sabrina Santos, failure would be not giving everything in their power to extend their daughter's life expectancy, now only about 30 years.

Sabrina's mother said her daughter loves to read mystery books, swim and ride horses, but that she requires therapy every day and has difficulty with many activities, including running.

"I can't tell you how much what Jay does means to us," said Selma Santos, Sabrina's mother. "I can't tell you how difficult this can be for a family."

For Fiedler, this is a personal battle.

Ellie Levy, daughter of Fiedler's longtime friend and agent, Brian Levy, has cystic fibrosis. And Fiedler is committed to helping the cause.

Perhaps this is why, when asked one thing he would like to accomplish in his lifetime, Fiedler doesn't choose winning a Super Bowl.

"My professional goal is to win the Super Bowl," Fiedler said. "But if I could only accomplish one thing for the rest of my life, it would be to be a good person, a good human being, and to have a lasting effect on other people."

For more information on the Reach for the Stars Foundation, call (305) 865-5588.

joe_schad@pbpost.com

