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Sports, 1C

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Lafayette Jeff classmates forge an unforeseeable bond



Lafayette Jeff junior Cody Payne suffers from muscular dystrophy. Last Friday, offensive guard Drew DeBoer, right, got Payne a sideline pass so he could watch the Bronchos defeat Kokomo on Homecoming. PHOTO COURTESY OF KIM DEBOER

You've got a friend in me

Sam King Lafayette Journal & Courier | USA TODAY NETWORK

Nobody ever came to sit with Cody Payne during lunch period. ■ Classmates never gave him the chance to show he's just like any other 16-year-old kid roaming the hallways who likes to play video games and frets about homework assignments. ■ Many looked at the Lafayette Jefferson junior and saw a kid in a wheelchair. ■ Not Drew DeBoer. ■ As an offensive guard for the football team, DeBoer isn't a small guy and growing up that led to some teasing from his peers. ■ The senior could somewhat relate to the struggle of fitting in, so a few weeks ago, he took his lunch over to the table where no student dare sit, plopped down next to Payne and started up a conversation. **See FRIEND, Page 2A**

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Dueling accounts at issue for Rosenstein

Eric Tucker and Michael Balsamo
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The fate of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein could turn on whether President Donald Trump believes the account of an ex-FBI official who, as Trump once asserted in a tweet, had “LIED! LIED! LIED!”

Rosenstein discussed secretly recording Trump, though one person who was present at the time said Rosenstein was just being sarcastic, and reportedly suggested removing the commander in chief from office. Rosenstein issued a swift denial to both claims.

The revelation that the second-ranking Justice Department official had even broached those ideas has created even more uncertainty for him at a time when Trump has railed against law enforcement leadership he says is biased against him.

The president, at a Missouri rally Friday night, said there was a “lingering stench” at the Justice Department that “we’re going to get rid of.”

A key witness in the episode is Andrew McCabe, who was temporarily elevated to FBI director after Trump fired James Comey. McCabe documented conversations with senior officials, including Trump and Rosenstein, in memos that have been provided to special counsel Robert Mueller as part of the Trump-Russia investigation.

The discussion about possibly recording Trump oc-



Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein denies claims that he discussed secretly recording the president. AP

curred during a meeting with McCabe in May 2017 following Comey’s firing.

A memo from McCabe also describes Rosenstein as having discussed the potential removal of the president under the Constitution.

While Trump has publicly scorned Rosenstein, the president has been every bit as harsh toward McCabe, who was fired in March amid a watchdog investigation

that concluded he repeatedly lied about his involvement in a news media disclosure.

Trump once called McCabe’s firing a “great day for democracy” and asserted without elaboration that McCabe knew all “about the lies and corruption going on at the highest levels of the FBI.”

Friday’s news reports raised the prospect that Trump could fire Rosenstein. Any dismissal could affect Mueller’s investigation into possible coordination between Russia and Trump’s presidential campaign. Rosenstein appointed Mueller and oversees his work.

Rosenstein’s comments were first reported by The New York Times, which also said he raised the idea of using the 25th Amendment to remove Trump as unfit for office. Rosenstein denied it.

The differing accounts of the conversation underscore the conflicts that roiled the FBI and Justice Department early in the Trump administration. Rosenstein, just weeks into his job, wrote a memo critical of Comey’s handling of the Hillary Clinton email server investigation that the White House used as justification for firing Comey.

Comey and McCabe have provided wildly divergent accounts about who knew what when regarding a 2016 Wall Street Journal story on an FBI investigation into the Clinton Foundation. The inspector general’s office has accepted Comey’s account over McCabe’s in concluding that McCabe repeatedly lied to internal investigators under oath. McCabe denies that.

Friend

Continued from Page 1A

“He saw that I was sitting by myself, so he thought I might want some company,” said Payne, who struggles with muscular dystrophy and has needed to use a wheelchair since he was 12 years old.

Then DeBoer returned the next lunch period. And the one after that.

Payne went from no friends to befriending one of the stars of Lafayette Jeff’s seventh-ranked football team.

“He was shy at first, really timid, but he has opened up a lot,” DeBoer said.

Payne, being in the situation he is, never thought much of daily activities outside of school work and video games. But when one of the best players on a state-ranked football team invites you to a game — and gives you a sideline pass — you change your Friday night plans.

It’s a daily struggle for Lori Payne, Cody’s mother, to get him transported to where he needs to go.

As Cody navigates his wheelchair into the school office Monday morning, he moans and groans while trying to squeeze into tight spaces. Life was never easy from birth. Around his third birthday, Riley Hospital for Children gave his family the diagnosis.

Cody was sick and tests revealed his muscles were weakening because he had muscular dystrophy.

Simple routines everyone takes for granted, such as bathing or getting dressed are a chore.

Going to a football game for three hours was going to be a daunting task, but Lori Payne was going to make sure her youngest son enjoyed this experience.

“That means the world to me,” Lori said. “Somebody is willing to spend time with Cody and get to know him and talk with him and help him out, that means a lot to me as a mother.”

When Cody was 12 and complications became so bad that he had to have a wheelchair for mobility, he pretty much accepted he was going to live a stressful life.

But last Friday night, a 58-13 Lafayette Jeff victory over Kokomo on Homecoming, he forgot about his worries for a few hours thanks to his new friend, who happened to be one of Jeff’s captains.

DeBoer had quietly arranged for Cody Payne to have this experience. He’s neighbors with Erin Teal, the assistant to Jeff principal Mark Preston. He inquired about the sideline pass with her, then with Preston and athletic director Peyton Stovall.

Preston said it was an easy decision.

“We talk a lot about inclusion and involving all students regardless of their backgrounds or their disability or whatever it may be to make them a part of the Broncho family,” Preston said.

DeBoer did all this without the knowledge of the football team.

“I didn’t think it was something too big. It is just something that should be expected of everyone. Be a decent person. Don’t just look at someone and see a wheelchair, look at someone and see a person.”

Cody Payne
Lafayette Jeff Senior

“Nobody asked him to do it. Nobody even really knew about it,” Bronchos football coach Pat Shanley said. “Drew didn’t ask anybody’s permission. He just went to Mr. Preston and said, ‘Can we get Cody a sideline pass?’ and he got it done. I think he sets an example for all of his teammates.”

Once on the field, he was greeted by one of his favorite teachers, Nathan Sheets. Sheets has Payne in first period integrated chemistry and physics class on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Sheets also is a member of the football coaching staff.

“Cody gave me a fist bump and I told him it meant a lot to everybody that he came,” Sheets said.

He was able to spot his lunch room pal, the 6-foot-2, 288-pound left guard wearing No. 71 and paving the way for an offensive showcase.

Before the game, DeBoer made sure Cody knew the offensive line was where to find him, giving him a “Pancake Platoon” flag to hold. A pancake in football refers to when an offensive lineman blocks a defender to the ground.

They’ve continued their lunch room banter in a constantly growing friendship. DeBoer did it so Payne would have a friend, but ended up benefiting just as much.

“I just thought I am going to be his friend,” DeBoer said. “I didn’t want to do it for attention, like, hey, there’s a football player talking to a kid in a wheelchair. I just wanted to do it for him.”

“I didn’t think it was something too big. It is just something that should be expected of everyone. Be a decent person. Don’t just look at someone and see a wheelchair, look at someone and see a person.”

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