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Coaches vs. Cancer is personal for Lavin

By Dana O'Neil

For Steve Lavin, Coaches vs. Cancer always has been more than a clever name for a good cause.

It's been personal.

His father, Cap, is a 21-year survivor of prostate cancer and his grandmother, Mary Brown, died of pancreatic cancer in 1977. Ten years ago, Lavin's young niece, Sophia, lost her right eye to retinal blastoma.

But in the last year, the fight against cancer for Lavin has gone from personal to deeply personal.

When he takes his seat for the Red Storm's game against No. 16 Arizona on Thursday night in the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer, Lavin will be more than a fighter in the crusade to beat cancer.

He will be a survivor.

In September of last year, Lavin was diagnosed with prostate cancer, undergoing surgery this October. He returned to work only 10 days ago.

"This week naturally has significance for me on a personal level because of both my family history and my own cancer battle," he said. "But I don't think I'm alone. From the six degrees [of separation] aspect, cancer affects all people in this world."

It was his family's history -- not his own fight -- that first inspired Lavin to use his public pulpit as a means to fight on behalf of cancer research. In his UCLA days, Lavin was a regular visitor at the City of Hope, meeting regularly with cancer patients himself and also with his team in tow.

Since coming to St. John's just one year ago, he's already raised more than \$1 million for Coaches vs. Cancer, including his Dribble for the Cure that in one day brought in \$24,000 for pediatric cancer research.

"I think I've always had an amplified awareness of how important it is to champion the cause of finding a cure for cancer," Lavin said. "Even before my diagnosis, I had a very personal reason to believe how vital it was to find a cure."

Lavin, of course, is not alone.

In a profession based on competition, college basketball has found a unifying topic in Coaches vs. Cancer. Now in its 18th year, the collaboration between the National Association of Basketball Coaches and the American Cancer Society has raised more than \$50 million for cancer research.

There is plenty wrong with college sports these days.

Coaches vs. Cancer is one thing that is plenty right.
