

Hundreds brave storm, honor Stamford soccer coach

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NORWALK -- Keith Segovia hopes to fight his cancer through 2010 and attend the Soccer World Cup next summer.

"I'm in a position where I want to battle as long as I can," Segovia said.

A lifetime's worth of friends, family, and pupils thanked the 31-year-old soccer coach and former professional player last night for inspiring them.

After a colon cancer diagnosis in late 2005 cut short his professional soccer career in Europe, Segovia continued to play and coach youth girls soccer in Stamford.

"All my friends have turned out to show their love and support; it just feels very good," Segovia said.

More than 200 youth and adult soccer players, family, and friends crowded the SoNo Field House for the Keith Lee Segovia Indoor Soccer Classic, a tournament to raise money to defray medical expenses for Segovia, a Stamford native.

Two weeks ago, doctors told Segovia, a star at Stamford High School and Southern Connecticut State University, that he likely had weeks to live due to the spread of the disease, said his brother, Jason Segovia.

"The reason he is here is that he truly wants to be here," said Jason Segovia, 34.

With a snowstorm looming, Ken Cenatiempo, an organizer of the event, thanked the crowd for a "great showing for what is supposed to be a nasty night."

Keith Segovia told the crowd to have a good time.

"You guys are my family," he said. "I don't want you going soft. Let's play soccer."

The tournament was to run from 5 p.m. to midnight, with 24 teams in three age groups playing 5-on-5 games with goalies. The National Weather Service called for 10 to 15 inches of snow. Stamford Mayor Michael Pavia declared a snow emergency through Sunday, asking residents not to park on city roads marked with snow emergency signs. The Bell Street, Bedford Street and Government Center garages are available for free parking during the emergency.

After learning Segovia's condition had worsened, Cenatiempo and other Norwalk Mariner teammates put out the word about a fundraiser.

The SoNo Field House hosted the event at no cost, and middle and junior high school girl soccer players from the Stamford Youth Soccer League sold baked goods to raise money.

"He is an amazing coach," said 10-year-old Molly Magarian. "He has a way of making you work hard without getting angry and shows you a lot of respect."

Segovia played on the 1999 Southern Connecticut State University men's soccer team that won the Division 2 national championship, and played for two years for Piast Gilace, a professional soccer team in Poland.

A team of SCSU men's soccer alumni, including New York/New Jersey Red Bulls star Mike Petke, turned out last night to play.

Segovia was a key part of the 1999 championship team that went 20-0-0, said Tom Lang, SCSU's men's soccer coach since 1997. Segovia became captain in 2000.

"He's always been a guy who relished life," Lang said.

Guido and Agnes Segovia said they remain hopeful their son will beat the odds.

Both recalled how their son displayed a passion for soccer early, earning his way onto Jason Segovia's 9-year-old's division team at age 5.

"He has the willpower to beat this," Agnes Segovia said. "We're living life one step at a time."

Keith Segovia planned to play during the tournament for a brief stretch.

Segovia said his focus is spending time with his family in Stamford, especially his brothers, Jason and Sean, 28, and sister, Elizabeth, 27.

Donations can be sent to the Norwalk Mariners Soccer Club, c/o the Segovia Family, Ted Cenatiempo, 14 Raynor Place, Trumbull, CT 06611.