Rick Dunetz

Rick Dunetz is the founder and executive director of The Side-Out Foundation. His love for volleyball drew him to the world of coaching in 2002, and he hasn’t left the courts since. He was the assistant coach of the West Springfield High School girls volleyball team from 2002-2003, before assuming the head coach position from 2004 through 2007. In that time, “Coach D” led the Spartans to the district finals every year, once to win their first championship which sent them to the regional semifinals (2004).

Dunetz’s 2004 team was special. When they learned that his mom was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time – this time with an incurable form – the players rallied around their coach and worked hard to overcome their underdog status. Dunetz’s mom, Gloria, found inspiration in their determination and courage. A high school volleyball team helped to give her the strength to learn more about her diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer and overcome fear of what the future held.

In 2005, Dunetz decided to harness the strength and heart of his 2004 team and do something to inspire other volleyball players to connect with the breast cancer cause. That summer, he started The Side-Out Foundation and hosted a grass volleyball tournament to raise funds for breast cancer research supporting people fighting the latest stage of the disease. At the tournament’s peak, it fielded 300 teams on 50 nets and raised more than $60,000.

In 2008, he followed his passion and quit his day job to support the foundation full-time. It was clear that in order to make a big impact with The Side-Out Foundation, he must find a way to connect to the volleyball community at a national level. After some initial research, he saw some interesting things happening around the country where educational institutions were dedicating one of their matches to raise funds and awareness for different causes and donating those funds to various charities. In the first part of the that year, Dunetz pulled together a database of 20,000 volleyball coaches and sent general emails asking them to unite under the breast cancer cause and dedicate the funds to a single goal: to change the way breast cancer is treated forever.

Today, 3,000 volleyball teams throughout the U.S. and overseas host Dig Pink® events to teach and inspire communities to join The Side-Out Foundation in their mission. More than $9 million has been raised since 2008, and the funds are supporting cutting-edge breast cancer research that is focused on personalized medicine for breast cancer patients with metastatic disease. The results have been shared with oncologists and scientists around the world. Dunetz’s mom lived with stage 4 breast cancer for six years and cheered at many a volleyball game before her death in 2010. Every milestone The Side-Out Foundation reaches is celebrated in her memory. She remains Side-Out’s inspiration and motivation.

Prior to establishing his presence in the sport of volleyball, Dunetz worked in the technology industry where he mastered the art of data mining, still one of his favorite pastimes. He enjoys pushing the limits of all things computer-related and is dedicated to utilizing his skills to make a difference for breast cancer patients and their families. He lives in Northern Virginia with his wife, Akiyo, and their two cats.