



It is never easy losing someone, let alone a teammate, but Team Louisiana's softball team had to deal with the loss of their teammate, Stephen Harward, while preparing for the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games. Harward, part of the Softball team from Hammond, LA, unfortunately passed away a few months before the event.

Coach Trey Earhart said about Harward, "When Steve passed away, it was like losing a family member. He was the heart of our team. He always made teammates laugh and enjoy being on the team. He was our stat guy and so excited to be a part of Team Louisiana. When I have a rough day, I think of Steve and it puts a smile on my face. He is missed daily."

During 2022 Special Olympics USA Games, the team has decided to hang Stephen's Louisiana jersey in the dugout for each of their games, as a reminder that he is there with them. When speaking with his teammates, there is still a sense of comradery with Stephen. Athlete Brian Phillips stated, "he (Stephen) was a good athlete and loved playing with all of us. He always made everybody laugh. He loved playing for VooDoo (local Tangipahoa Special Olympics Louisiana team) and always brought cupcakes and brownies for us to practice."

Stephen also brought his favorite stuffed monkey to every tournament. According to Coach Trey Earhart, Stephen called it his "lucky monkey," and his team got used to seeing it at all of their competitions. Upon Stephen's passing his family asked the team if they would like anything of Stephen's, and the team immediately agreed that they would like the stuffed monkey to continue the tradition of having it at every competition. During Special Olympics USA Games, the same monkey that Stephen carried around, and was present at his funeral, will now sit in the dugout with Team Louisiana!

Unified Partner Brooke Balser sums up Stephen's lasting impact, "losing someone like Stephen was extremely hard for our organization, but it makes us appreciate Special Olympics Louisiana and the amazing teammates and friends that it brings into our lives. He was the light that shined for everyone."

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Special Olympics Louisiana is attending the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games in Orlando, FL with 95 delegates from across Louisiana. More information can be found at www.laso.org or by calling 800.345.6644.

Special Olympics Louisiana

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