



Zak Rivera

September 28, 1982 - September 12, 2025

Zak Rivera, 42, passed away peacefully at his home, with the family and friends he loved most dearly at his bedside. Throughout his life, Zak embodied unwavering positivity and determination that made him an exceptional competitive athlete, entrepreneur, and role model. He applied that same optimism and tenacity during his six-year fight against cancer, continuously defying expectations while inspiring all those around him.

Born in Arlington Heights, Ill., Zak fell in love with competitive sports, especially baseball, at a young age. With his considerable athletic talent and disciplined work ethic, he excelled both on and off the field. In high school, Zak was an All-Conference athlete in football and baseball, securing a full-ride baseball scholarship to University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, where he earned All-Conference and Horizon League awards. In Milwaukee, he met the love of his life, Kristen, who became his wife in 2012.

After earning an MBA from UWM, Zak left Milwaukee to coach college baseball, a role that ultimately inspired him to dedicate his life's work to coaching others through personal training. In 2013, he opened Focused Results Personal Training, which he grew into a well-respected business and fixture of the community in Lake Bluff, Ill. Inside Zak's fitness studio, the walls feature words like "courage," "confidence," and "commitment" — virtues he exemplified in his own life. Over the course of his career, he helped hundreds

of clients embrace healthier lifestyles while still taking time to mentor high school students and other young business owners.

Diagnosed with cancer in March 2019, Zak resolved to continue living life to the fullest and making every day a good day. Throughout the highs and lows of his treatment, Kristen was not only his devoted partner and caregiver but also his “rock,” providing loving support and stability for the entire family, including their young son, Wesley.

While Zak was a hero to many, his greatest fan remains Wesley, who was only 17 months old at the time of Zak’s initial cancer diagnosis. Zak took enormous pride in his role as Wesley’s “head coach.” Whether they were throwing batting practice in their backyard or holding wrestling matches in the living room, Zak relished every moment he spent with Wesley. Even while coping with the side effects of chemo, radiation, and multiple surgeries, Zak showed up for Wesley’s games and made his birthday cake each year. Being there for his family was what kept him going.

Through his actions and quiet leadership, Zak taught us that what matters is not the time you have, but rather what you do with the time you’re given. From catching a Duke basketball game to visiting Disney World, Maui, Wyoming, and Colorado, Zak stayed active in the last 18 months of his life. In between cycles of chemotherapy and several clinical trials, he and Kristen also raised thousands of dollars for cancer research and financial assistance for other families affected by cancer. Zak’s relentless pursuit of investigative treatments and commitment to advancing cancer research to help other patients stay focused on fighting will be part of his legacy.

For Kristen and Wesley — the two people he loved “to the moon and back” — Zak will forever be the MVP of Team Rivera. He also leaves behind his loving parents, Juan and Laurie; brothers Tony (Shannon) and Alex (Emily); father-

in-law and mother-in-law, DeWayne and Carla Beckley; sisters-in-law Jessica Rupnow (William), Brittni Fuller (Dan), and Ashley Lindberg (Zach); along with many nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Zak had a profound love for his colleagues, friends, and family, who benefited daily from his signature warmth and frequent acts of kindness. Those who had the honor of knowing him will deeply miss his gentle character, innate drive, and fierce spirit that refused to yield to any obstacle. He will also be remembered for his passion for music, the outdoors, cooking over an open fire, and his beloved Chicago sports teams (Go White Sox!).

Zak's family extends their heartfelt gratitude to the Focused Results team, the Team4Zak community, and Cocktails & Caregivers, all of whom have surrounded the Riveras with endless support and encouragement throughout the years. The Riveras would also like to express their sincere appreciation to the staff at the Kellogg Cancer Center in Highland Park, Ill., and MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for their exceptional care.

A Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, September 27, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. at The Church of the Holy Spirit, 400 E. Westminster Road., Lake Forest, Ill., with a small reception to follow. Interment will be private.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to support Wesley's college fund by going to <https://www.ugift529.com/> and entering Code: 95Q-Q3X for direct donations.

Those who wish to make a memorial gift in Zak's name to support pediatric cancer research and a treasure chest may be made to the Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago at <https://my.luriechildrens.org/page/88273/donate/1>.

For more information, contact Reuland & Turnbough Funeral Directors of Lake Forest at Director@RTfunerals.com or (847) 234-9649.

Cemetery Details

The Church of the Holy Spirit Columbarium

400 East Westminster
Lake Forest, IL 60045
(847) 234-7633
<http://www.chslf.org/>

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP 27. 1:00 PM (CT)

The Church of the Holy Spirit
400 E. Westminster Avenue
Lake Forest, IL 60045

Tribute Wall

LJ

“ Zak truly was an incredible inspiration to so many, including me, and his light will continue to shine and inspire us all. Bless Kristen, Wesley and all of Zaks family. My prayers are with you all. Love, Lynn Jessen

Lynn Jessen - September 27, 2025 at 03:45 PM

JA

“ I have been trying to figure a way to say the right thing. A way of describing Zak & what he meant to the UWM Panther Baseball family. From the very 1st time I saw Zak, I could see the excitement & pride to play College Baseball. He played such a special role in making the program better not only athletically but even more in what defines a Team.

One thing that makes a Coach feel successful is seeing your players work hard, have fun, enjoy the game & be well liked by teammates. Zak was that & more & his smile while completing was infectious.

Zak, I will never forget the diving, impossible backhand catch that won a ballgame for the Panthers, but more important the look on your face was beyond special!

I will always remember you for your friendship, caring & positive influence of those around you! Thanks Zak, for sharing a part of your Life with us, we are better for it,

jerry Augustine - September 27, 2025 at 12:04 AM

VH

“ I worked with Zak at Highland Park Hospital Health and Fitness Center. I watched him as he grew OUT of his job. I've followed his career & was so proud when he opened his own studio. I came across his obituary just now and it brought me to tears. Way too young a man so talented. I will remember his beautiful smile, infectious laugh and gentle demeanor. My deepest condolences to his wife, son, & family. May your beautiful memories help you through this difficult time. I know it will help me.

Val Hahamy - September 26, 2025 at 11:18 PM

JR

“ Zak, my son, it's been two weeks and I can't face the reality that you are with God. We shared many fun moments and you at the end knew more about life than I did. I learned from you but more importantly, you gave Wesley, your son a good foundation to success. It will be up to Kristen, the Beckley's, the Rivera's and your awesome friends to continue the process. I love you son with my whole heart and my eyes fill with tears knowing that you're gone but I know that spiritually you are watching over all of us. ❤️ Dad

Juan Rivera - September 26, 2025 at 04:57 PM

KH

I knew Zak mostly through the eyes of his parents. I am a longtime college friend of his mom, Laurie. Years ago we introduced our families to one another but mostly talked about them at our annual college girlfriends get togethers. My heart breaks for Kristin and Wesley, the whole Rivera family and Kristin's family. Your world has been shaken for some time now, but life without Zak seems unimaginable. I pray God will bring comfort to all of you as you grieve and move forward.
Kaye Haskins

Kaye Haskins - September 28, 2025 at 03:44 PM

WW

“ Zak! Nobody was more fun to talk baseball with than Zak! He loved all sports, but his eyes would light up about baseball, and even during workouts at his studio. (He would play your choice of music when you came to his studio, or in my case, switch to the MLB channel). When I came to Zak for help in loosening up my calves for jogging...he did such a good job, that when I walked a few feet out of his studio to jog the Lake Bluff trail, I was so loose, my wife had to come pick me up just short of Milwaukee! Maybe Wesley would like to play a little catch with another Wesley some time soon! Wes & Cindy Wenk

Wes Wenk - September 23, 2025 at 03:28 PM



“ I had the honor of meeting Zak freshmen year of college and remaining his friend throughout. He was a kind, beautiful soul even as a college kid. Thinking of all of his family and friends as the world grieves the loss of an amazing human.



Angie Rieves - September 21, 2025 at 02:30 PM

SR

“ Juan and Laurie and Zak’s wife Kristen and son Wesley....i am heartbroken and shocked to hear of Zak’s passing. As you know we were all like family during the kids young years in baseball. It actually was our life...so many games and with them being on a traveling team also..at times we had games in different cities on the same day. We spent a lot of time with each other. I remember Zak as always being a well respected young man. He loved baseball and was very good at it! I remember Juan always taking Videos of him to send to colleges when Zak was in high school. I’m praying that all of you get through this awful time in your life’s. R.I.P Zak....Gone too soon!
Sandra Lewandowski ..Mamma Lew



Sandra Lewandowski Raymond - September 21, 2025 at 09:20 AM

MK

“ Remembering how he loved the White Sox and always in High School wearing their colors.

What a wonderful, loving and caring person, always sharing kindness to all who knew him.

Lasting memory, when over for dinner, he couldn't have items on the plate touching. He would circle the plate and always ate the main course item last. Such a charming character!

Zak, your journey in life was cut short, but the moments you spent with family and friends will last a lifetime of memories. Even those that knew you in your youth still remember.

*Rest in peace and watch over your family from afar. Lots of love!
Marie and Steve Korn*

Marie Korn - September 20, 2025 at 03:09 PM

CM

“ Hi Kristen and Wesley, I am so sorry to hear of Zak's passing. My heart is breaking for you. What a strong, kind and caring man Zak was. He had such strength and courage while carrying his cross. I always so enjoyed visiting with him when I got the chance to see him and you. I thought about and prayed for him almost every day for the past several years. He is now rejoicing with our Lord in heaven and will always look down on you and Wesley here on earth and ask the Lord to give you strength and guidance during this saddest of times. Will continue to keep you in my prayers and if you need anything at all please feel free to reach out at anytime! Love you all Carol

Carol McDevitt - September 19, 2025 at 04:34 PM

SC

“ Such a beautiful tribute. Zak was a wonderful person. Deepest sympathy to Kristen & Wes ❤️

-Stacie Cronkleton



Stacie Cronkleton - September 19, 2025 at 11:14 AM