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## For Youkilis, painful memories fuel desire to help prevent suicides

Posted July 25, 2009 08:26 PM

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Adam Hunger for The Boston Globe

Kevin Youkilis leaves the stage after delivering his emotional remarks.

By Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondent

NEEDHAM — As an up-and-coming baseball player at the University of Cincinnati, Kevin Youkilis sometimes was told he wasn't good enough for the big leagues. But his roommate, a close friend since high school, stood by him.



"People told me throughout my college years that, 'I don't know. He's kind of pudgy. He can't really move around well. I don't know if he can be a professional athlete,'" the Red Sox infielder recalled Saturday. "He told me ... 'The day you make it to the major leagues is the day I'll be there.'"

On Thanksgiving Day of his sophomore year, Youkilis learned that his friend had committed suicide. To this day, he said, "I sit back at night and wonder what I could've done."

But that was not the only friend Youkilis lost to suicide. There were two others.

Youkilis shared those painful memories before nearly 200 people gathered at the Sheraton Needham Hotel for a benefit to raise awareness about teen suicide and how to prevent it. Needham has lost five teens to suicide in the past five years.

"This is something that when I saw all of you 18- and 19-year-olds standing up, I saw a reflection of myself," said the 30-year-old ballplayer, directing his words to about 50 teens in the audience.

"A lot of times there's stories around of Kevin Youkilis as a baseball player. There's not a lot of stories of what I went through when I was growing up," he

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said.

"It's a little tough for me to talk about this," he added, pausing to collect his thoughts. "This is something that, as you can see, has affected me my whole life."

Youkilis was asked to speak through his charity, Kevin Youkilis Hits for Kids, to raise money to support Riverside Trauma Center's efforts to prevent youth suicide. But when he revealed his personal connection to the topic, many were surprised, including several event organizers.

After his speech, 20-year-old Garrett Goodman, a Needham High School graduate and a friend of several of the town's suicide victims, said the ballplayer's stories hit home.

"It's comforting to know that he's a normal person, too," said Goodman, who attends the University of Vermont. "He made such a connection with all of us."

In an 18-month span, between November 2004 and April 2006, four Needham teens committed suicide.

Jason Roberts, 18, who graduated from Needham High School last year, took his own life in March. His father, Richard, gave a passionate testimony about the loss of his son and said he was surprised to hear of Youkilis's close connection to youth suicide.

"I was touched by his willingness to discuss such a personal topic, not just because he is a celebrity and an athlete, but because this isn't an easy thing to talk about," said Roberts. "I thought his emotion was great for the kids to see. Their reaction to Kevin was unbelievable."

The first time a close friend of Youkilis's committed suicide was during high school. He said he was with that friend the same night he killed himself.

"I woke up to find out, and I had no idea what to do or where to go, who to talk to," he said. "There's a lot of times I ask myself, 'What could I have done that night, before it happened?'"

Youkilis did not talk about the third friend who committed suicide.

He said that life poses problems for all, and the key is not to quit.

"It's not going to be easy, and it's not supposed to be easy," added the ballplayer who has claimed two World Series rings, made two All-Star appearances, earned a Gold Glove, and recently signed to a four-year extension.

He urged parents not to put too much pressure on their children and told teens that the problems they have now tend to seem bigger than they actually are.

Youkilis, who made his major league debut with Boston in 2004, still remembers how his roommate had faith in him. "And to this day," he said, "I wish he could've been there to see it."

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## 11 COMMENTS SO FAR...

### 1. Kevin

Thank you for working with troubled kids. I see it all the time as I have had some of them working with me. I agree that parents should not put pressure on their kids but let them develop inside their own potential. Keep up the good work.

God bless

Posted by [norfolkid](#) July 25, 09 09:19 PM

2. Needham is not alone. Dover and Sherborn have had at least four in the past several years, classmates of my two sons. The problem is widespread and we don't talk about it enough. The pressures on these kids socially and academically are huge. Good for Needham for talking...

Posted by [chocolate chip](#) July 25, 09 09:52 PM

3. Thank you so much Mr. Youkilis and may God Bless.

Posted by [Bill](#) July 25, 09 10:23 PM

4. yoooouuuuuk.  
you rock, thank you.

Posted by [catherine](#) July 25, 09 10:52 PM

5. most parents dont know when or how to recognize the difference btwn teen moodiness and depression. work in a HS and its amazing the number of kids who cant talk to their parents about depression or drug use that they cant handle. kids dont want to trouble their parents or they think they can handle it on their own. I am gratefull to Mr. Youklis for having the courage to say,"even I didnt know", dont be afraid to recognize what is right in front of you and listen to your gut instinct. thank you for sharing such painful memories to benefit others.

Posted by [Terri](#) July 25, 09 11:07 PM

6. Suicide is so very painful for those left behind. Forever wondering "what could I have done?" Sadly, all too often there is no outward sign that something is terribly wrong. What we need to do is make sure ALL people, including teens, have ample opportunity to seek help. Unfortunately, there will always be times that no matter how much "help" is out there, some will never seek it. Sad, very sad. Kudos to Youk for his involvement.

Posted by [HD](#) July 25, 09 11:08 PM

7. Class act. To bear a personal side like this is rare for a role model like this. Your friends (past and present) are standing and applauding I'm sure. I am too...

Posted by [Harry](#) July 25, 09 11:21 PM

8. Thanks Youk.....My son tried to kill himself last year. He was saved by a friend that called authorities and traced his cell phone while we slept. he has since gotten help and doing much better. Keep up the discussion. It helps Eddie

Posted by [Eddie](#) July 25, 09 11:30 PM

9. Keep the focus on suicide prevention. The successful suicide can never change his or her mind, and that's the real tragedy. The survivors of someone who commits suicide also suffer in countless, endless, painful ways. You never forget the pain, regret and guilt that suicide brings to your life. It is a dreadful fact of life that we must never stop trying to prevent. Kudos to Youklis and Riverside for making sure we don't ever forget this critical public and personal health issue.

Posted by [CGRJr](#) July 25, 09 11:58 PM

10. So good to see someone who is not afraid to talk about this hard-to-talk about topic. It always seemed that Youk was a class act both on and off the field and this only proves it more so.

Posted by [markj](#) July 27, 09 04:38 PM

11. My sister took her own life after calling me to tell me she was sad. I told her that I would take some time off of work to spend some time with her. I will never get over the pain in my heart. The loved ones left behind are left to both suffer and doubt themselves. Thank you to Mr. Youklis for taking the time to talk to these young people and to let them know that no one person or thing is worth taking your life over.

Posted by [nada](#) July 27, 09 05:53 PM

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