

PEACHTREE RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



Sawdey back from Iraq to support kids

Go to a Peachtree Ridge softball or football game and check the stands. See the grinning guy with his left arm in a sling. That's Jeff Sawdey.

If he appears more pleased than most to be there, forgive him. He has a really good reason.

The 38-year-old thought he would miss these games. He figured his highlights of his son Chris' senior football season and his daughter Ashley's sophomore softball season would be viewed on video, or through photographs —

VIEWPOINTS

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whatever family and friends could mail to him in Al Asad, Iraq.

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"I'm still just so excited that I'll be able to watch (their games) in person," said Sawdey, who returned home from military service less than three weeks ago. "That was my homecoming, being able to watch the kids."

Sawdey, a U.S. Marine, was a warrant officer in charge of an ammunition supply point in Iraq until mid-July when he ruptured his left biceps tendon lifting a 60-pound ammunition box. With sandstorms and other complications, it took him nearly three weeks to get to doctors in Germany. He hoped to have the injury repaired quickly, so he could return to his unit.



Jeff Sawdey

home to Georgia for rehabilitation.

His initial welcome home was joyous and tear-filled, but part of returning was bittersweet. Sawdey, who had been deployed to Iraq in 2003, was a veteran leader. He was in charge of a unit comprised entirely of young soldiers, some just 19, in Iraq for the first time.

"I wanted to come back as a group, with all the kids I took over," said

But the doctors sent him to Twentynine Palms, Calif., for surgery, then back

Sawdey, a 1988 Duluth grad. "It's exciting and fun to watch them come back and see their families, to see their faces light up. ... They busted their butts over there. We supported Iraq, Afghanistan. I watched those kids grow over there."

Unfortunately, he had to leave them early. But his unit's expected to be home much sooner than its initial return date in December.

Sawdey, still on active duty as he recovers, talks with the Marines in Iraq once a day and e-mails regularly about administrative tasks. But his main job is the long recuperation of his arm.

He also can be seen regularly at Peachtree Ridge

events this season. He will be the one soaking up the blessing of simply being in the stands.

On the field, his kids will compete knowing their father's right there with them. Not just in spirit, either.

"It's awesome to have him back," said his son Chris, Peachtree Ridge's starting fullback.

"It wasn't the best way for him to come home, being hurt, but I'm just glad he'll get to see my senior season. I was pretty worried about him being here to see it."

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