Football in Iowa.

So many kids go to bed at night dreaming of Friday night lights...waiting for their chance...their moment.

Zac Easter was one of those kids.

"He started playing football in the 4th grade.  Yeah we're a football family. My husband coached for 14-15 years at the college level. He was active with all the boys in youth sports and all of youth football. So to say that they enjoyed it is probably an understatement. They loved the sport, they still do," said Brenda Easter.

Even as a young linebacker – Zac was known for one thing: he could hit...and he could hit hard.

"Zac was a little smaller, maybe not as tall, but he was mighty and vicious, and not afraid to take on the biggest players, well over 6 foot 250 pounds, made several comments saying they hated going up against Zac. Because he brought it every single time," said Brenda Easter.

Zac looked back on his days of playing youth football...in a journal.

“I'm sure they only remember me leading with my head. I even remember Austin's dad offering to buy him a PS2 if Austin would learn to hit as hard as me on game days. I learned around this age that if I used my head as a weapon and literally put my head down on every play up until the last play I ever played.”

Zac was in 6th grade when the complaints started...he had severe headaches every day...he constantly felt sick or dizzy.

"When he was in middle school, he had a series of headaches, and we took him to a doctor and had cat scans. We did and followed every protocol to figure out why he had those headaches. In the end, the doctors believed it was hormonal," said Brenda Easter.

But it wasn't hormonal...not even close.

Zac continued to be a heavy hitter on the field for Indianola High School. And by his senior year, Zac was one of the leaders...the anchors of the defense.

The thorn is his side: concussions.  He had already suffered two in two months.

One during practice before the season started and another early on in the season, a concussion knocked Zac out of the game...and lineup for weeks...but he was determined to be back against rival Ankeny.

From his journal...

“I saw a doctor and lied about all my concussion symptoms.”

He was prepared for his rival game: he was wearing a special Xenith helmet – designed to help protect against concussions...he was wearing cowboy collar to protect his neck.

He was shielded with armor – or so it seemed.

The armor didn't matter...Zac suffered another concussion...knocking him out of the game...out of the rest of the season...even ending his wrestling season...before it even started.

That's where the downward spiral started...

Excerpts from Zac's journal..“My depression kicked into full gear and I started having symptoms of anxiety. I feel like I've started to become delusional or I've been hearing and seeing things. Over the years I've been starting to forget people's names and just forget daily things.”

In the years that followed, Zac finished college...joined the National Guard...but things never felt normal for him.

Zac knew. He knew it was from the concussions...but he went to doctor after doctor...who thought it was something else...

"They treated him like a mental health issue and failed to recognize it was a traumatic brain injury. There's a big difference on how you treat those things. You wouldn't want a doctor treating a broken arm like a bruise," said Brenda Easter.

Zac wrote about it...he knew he had CTE...a progressive degenerative disease of the brain found in athletes with a history of repetitive head trauma.

Think of a wet sponge...we all know that if you leave a wet sponge sitting around...it gets moldy...and it can't go back to how it was before.

That's what was happening to Zac's brain...they didn't know that then...but they know that now.

On December 19, 2015, after years of internal torment, Zac put a bullet through his chest...and died.

His last wish: to have his brain donated to science.

"Your world is just crushed. It's surreal to believe that you were with him the day before. And then boom, he's gone. The truth is that he struggled so deeply and desperately at the end. It was really hard for our family because we were trying to help, he didn't believe there was help. We were trying to find the right doctors. Anyone. Who could help him. He became very removed. Unengaged," said Brenda Easter.

His final wishes...his journal detailing his battle...all found after Zac's funeral.

His family honoring him and donated his brain...confirming what Zac knew all along...he had CTE.

"And I look at it now and he's not with us anymore....but he's going to make it happen. He's going to make the world understand CTE and how concussions played a role in ruining his life. And he was going to make sure that we as his family fill the spokesperson role...making football safer.  There is nothing worse than sharing your worst nightmare with the entire world, but if we didn't we couldn't save another family from what we're going through. Or another athlete potentially having the same issues."

Her message to parents is simple..."Choose life. Choose to make the right decision so you don't ever have to go through what our family...what Zac went through. Because until we figure out how to cure, or treat, or even prevent, it's going to continue to happen."