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Gopher and Former Holy Family Catholic High School Linebacker to Receive 2014 Courage Award

Minneapolis, March 11, 2014 - Peter Westerhaus was a hard-nosed 6-3, 235-pound linebacker/tight end who as a Holy Family Catholic High School senior was selected the state's 2010 Mr. Football Award winner while leading his school to the state Class 3A title game. Westerhaus figured to be bound for similar collegiate success when he signed a national letter of intent with the Gophers in 2011.

But his dreams of college football glory ended before he ever played a down for the Gophers. Westerhaus was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, which led to a weight loss of 85 pounds.

For his strength in facing his adversity, Westerhaus has been named the Courage Award winner by The Minnesota Chapter of the National Football Foundation. Westerhaus and other award winners will be 2014 Minnesota Football Honors Awards Event, presented by the Minnesota Vikings. The seventh annual event, to be held on May 4th, 2014, will take place at the Hilton Minneapolis.

Westerhaus as a senior linebacker/tight end at Holy Family had 139 tackles and 49 receptions for 789 yards and 11 TDs. He said the values he learned on the playing field have helped him cope with his illness.

"Football taught me to battle through adversity which I have used throughout this illness because things don't always go your way," he said. "Football is just the greatest game. I used to sleep with a football as a kid. It is such a wonderful game."

Westerhaus said he was "very honored" to receive the Minnesota Chapter's Courage Award. Westerhaus attended games and practices with the Gophers last year whenever he was able, but his struggle with the disease is ongoing.

"Currently I am showing some improvement, although as my doctor says we are at a crawl with still some rough days ahead," Westerhaus said.

About the Minnesota Chapter of the National Football Foundation:

The mission of the Minnesota Chapter of the National Football Foundation is to serve Minnesota and the nation by developing leadership, sportsmanship, competitive spirit, and academic excellence in America's youth through promoting amateur football. The annual Minnesota Football Honors Awards Event, presented by the Minnesota Vikings, will be held on May 4th, 2014, at the Hilton Minneapolis. The event is open to the public, and tickets may be purchased online by visiting www.nffmn.org.