

THE 29ERS

This amazing tale is equal parts sad and uplifting...and a tad bit freaky.

“MOMMY! MOM! MOM! I MET ROD CAREW TODAY!”

Ever since he could remember, 11-year-old Konrad Reuland wanted to become a pro athlete just like his idol, Rod Carew, one of the best hitters in the history of baseball. So when the little boy got to meet the Hall-of-Famer at his elementary school, it was the best day of his life. Another great day came nearly a decade later in 2011 when Reuland—now a 6-foot-5, 260-pound football tight end—was signed by the San Francisco 49ers.

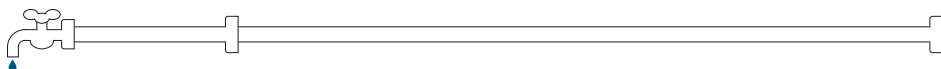
Described by friends as an “Ivan Drago lookalike with a big heart” (Drago was the imposing Russian boxer from *Rocky IV*), Reuland’s NFL career was off to a great start...until he injured his knee in 2013. The next few years were frustrating, as he was traded from team to team, rarely making the starting roster, all the while training as hard as he could to get back in the game. That’s what he was doing—working out—on November 28, 2016, when he heard a “click” in his head and felt a sharp pain behind his left eye. At the hospital, doctors confirmed the worst: it was a brain aneurysm. A few days later, while lying in his hospital bed, Reuland sent this text to his mother, Mary: “I’m about to kick this thing’s butt, with the help of God. He has something big in store for me.” A few minutes later, Reuland had a second, even larger, aneurysm. After 17 hours of surgery, he was placed on life support. Mary stayed by his side for days, frequently putting her ear on her son’s chest to listen to his beating heart.

OLD FRIENDS

Rod Carew wasn’t doing well, either. After suffering a massive heart attack in 2015, he was told he’d need a new heart and kidney. If he didn’t get them, the doctors said, he would be dead within a few years. By December 2017, the 71-year-old’s condition had worsened, and no matching donors had been found. He and his wife Rhonda were losing hope.

On December 12, Konrad Reuland died. He had checked the “Organ Donor” box on his driver’s license, so you can guess what happened: His liver went to a man in his 50s, his right kidney went to a woman in her 60s, and his heart and left kidney went to his childhood hero, Rod Carew—who happened to have the same blood type as Reuland and lived only 12 miles away in Los Angeles.

The coincidences don’t end there: A year earlier, Rod and his wife Rhonda started a heart disease awareness campaign called The Heart of 29 (Carew’s jersey number), and he ended up with the heart of a 29-year-old. “You never know,” he joked after the transplant surgery, “it could be time for a comeback.” And when the Carews and Reulands finally met in the spring of 2018, Rod let Mary put her ear on his chest and listen to her son’s beating heart.



A sloth has more bones in its neck than a giraffe does.