

Cyclists rally to lift up cancer-stricken mate

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Russell Tindol knows a thing or two about fighting uphill battles.

Most of the time, it's been while the competitive cyclist was perched on his road bike, strapped in a helmet and climbing an incline surrounded by his teammates from the Frazier Cycling Juniors of Suwanee.

But now, the 15-year-old from Lawrenceville wages a different battle — against cancer. And his teammates are still by his side.

Cyclists, family and friends brought out their bikes to "Ride for Russell" Wednesday night in Duluth. The 15- to 20-mile ride began at CycleWorks as a joint fund-raising effort between the Frazier Cycling Juniors and Rally Across America, an annual charity bike ride sponsored by the nonprofit group Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research.

In 2006, Russell and his team participated in that ride, when cancer wasn't even on the teenager's radar. In fact, he was the first on his team to turn in a donation.

Two years later, his teammates are rallying around Russell. A few days after Russell's teammates found out he was diagnosed with a brain tumor and would need chemotherapy, four boys showed up with buzzed haircuts, recalled coach Ralph Frazier. By the end of the week,

almost all of the boys had followed suit and even some of the fathers had cropped their hair in solidarity.

The tumor was discovered in April after Russell experienced sickness and dizziness at races. He had surgery shortly after.

"It comes so fast, a diagnosis like that, you don't have a whole lot of time to think," said Russell's father, Mike Tindol, a cyclist and triathlete. "You go into survival mode for your kid."

Frazier, who has coached Russell since he was 9 years old, described him as a slight kid with a knack for conquering hills. "That was his strong suit," Frazier said.

Russell planned on making it out to the ride but had to head to the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite when a fever broke out Tuesday night.

He paid his regrets on his blog where he keeps friends and teammates updated. "I'm feeling much better now and don't have a fever," he wrote. "I got a blood and platelets transfusion today to bring my counts back up."

His father said Russell lives by one motto these days: "Just deal with it."

"You win one battle, you fight one race — and you got another," Tindol said.

Wednesday night, Russell's teammates joined with two cyclists with the Rally Foundation riding from Washington, D.C., to Nashville, Tenn., during the leg of the tour passing through Atlanta.

"This is a way for us to fight back against this disease," said Tindol. "I see cancer being beaten one day."