

# From cancer to captain: Jackson Bloom's remarkable story of resilience

**By: Mikayla Kelly | November 1, 2022**

While most think of the COVID-19 pandemic as a curse, for some it was a blessing in disguise.

In New York State, high school football was taking a year and a half hiatus because of the pandemic. The absence of a fall 2020 season ensured that current Suffern captain, Jackson Bloom, never missed a single football game in his high school career.

On January 27, 2020, just two months before the world shut down, Jackson was diagnosed with Stage 2A Classical Hodgkins Lymphoma.

He displayed no typical symptoms. After working out, he came running to the kitchen asking why one side of his neck was much larger than the other. Although there was no immediate concern of it possibly being a tumor, after various opinions and finally an ultrasound that showed numerous bumps, that was it. In that week he was at an oncologist, preparing to start chemotherapy treatments.

Had he not been working out; it is likely that he would have gone months not knowing that the cancer was developing. Jackson's treatment plan included three cycles and six rounds of chemotherapy.

Despite going through cancer treatments during a global pandemic, there was only one thing on Jackson's mind: football.

He had grown up on the football field. Starting at 5-years-old, he played for the Suffern Pop Warner program and never stopped.

"Football was his carrot. At his very first oncology appointment, the first thing he asked his doctor was, 'Will I be able to play football in the fall?' his mother Amy Bloom said.

His doctors never told him yes, and if anything, they were almost leaning towards the idea of him never playing again.

Chemotherapy treatment was not an easy road for him. Simple things like eating his favorite foods, drinking plain water and using metal utensils made him violently nauseous. His veins would collapse from injections.

At times, he and his parents felt helpless. A white blood cell stimulate shot called Neulasta caused intense jaw and bone pain, and there was absolutely nothing to do about it except suffer.

When he finished treatments in May 2020, his physical condition was nowhere near ready to play in the fall. When it was announced that there would be spring season instead, there was no question in his mind that he would be back. The pandemic bought him just enough time to fully recover and prepare himself to play.

However, it is one thing to recover from cancer, but it is another thing to do it during a global pandemic. Because he had cancer of the immune system, there was no telling how his body would react to the virus. When the rest of the world started to return to normalcy, there was still an extra layer of fear for the Blooms until the vaccine was finally available.

“I feel like the attitude that I had was kind of more like an I don't care attitude, because if I don't care about it, it can't hurt me. Nothing that you don't care about can hurt us,” Jackson explained. “I kind of always had the idea that I was going to play again.”

His self-motivation paired with quick resilience was key in his process of getting back to football, but it was challenging.

With a disease that breaks down your body, the hardest part for him was simply gaining back weight. Coming back to that spring junior varsity season he was only 110 pounds; almost 20 pounds lighter than most of his teammates. He currently weighs in at 150, gaining 40 pounds in about a year.

This meant extra dedication off the field. Getting in the weight room and constantly pushing himself to be the best player he could, not wanting to be the weakest on the team.

In his first start as wide receiver on varsity last season, Jackson had his comeback moment, making a critical catch to score a touchdown for the Mounties. Tears were flowing and Amy's phone was buzzing with texts.

“I definitely remember my first varsity snap and in my first varsity game I scored a touchdown,” Jackson said. “I vividly remember seeing a coach trying to hold back tears, thinking like I could have died like a year and a half ago and now I'm scoring touchdowns.”

His journey continues to inspire the Suffern Football community, including first-year head coach Dan Muller, who has worked with Jackson the entirety of his high school career.

“Jackson inspires me as a coach because to see what he went through with his cancer and how he has bounced back to such an incredible person and athlete, it motivates me to be my best and to live each day to the fullest,” coach Muller said.

Entering his senior season this year, becoming the player he has looked up to since he was 5-years-old, he is not only playing to his fullest ability, but is taking on the role as one of the captains.

“Jackson is steadfast in his approach and leads by example. Facing adversity is a big part of life and we relate football as one of those sports closely related to life in a lot of aspects and Jackson's approach to dealing with adversity has been a positive influence for the team,” assistant coach David Dinuzzo said regarding his worthiness as captain.

This ability to overcome adversity has inspired a larger audience than just Suffern High School.

Jackson was nominated for USA Football's Heart of a Giant award. This award is given to a Tri-State high school athlete who demonstrates something special, exemplifying a relentless work ethic and unmatched love for the game.

Jackson is a nominee for this award because he chooses to live his everyday life showing others that going through a tough time does not mean a tough life, and if you choose to focus on the future rather than wallow in the bad times, it can get better.

“Jackson and I are the only two remaining people on the team that played since Kindergarten and seeing him go through what he did and still be able to play football at such a high level really shows his true grit,” co-captain Jack Kelly said.

While football is his escape, another important aspect of life for Jackson is school. Throughout his treatment, the pandemic and journey back to playing, he maintained a 3.74 GPA. He eagerly plans to attend college and eventually go onto law school.

Recently, at his two-and-a-half-year checkup, his doctors said that he no longer requires scans, and are very sure that his cancer will likely never come back.

For the longest time, Jackson did not want to acknowledge or be defined by this obstacle in his life, but now at almost 18-years-old, he is starting to embrace the fact that this was his struggle, and finally realize that it is a big deal how far he has come as an athlete and a person.