

Eye of the TIGER

After nine months, senior Calvin Jager is currently in remission **By Landon Hudson**



Calvin Jager COURTESY PHOTO

WALKING AWAY: Senior Calvin Jager leaves through the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital tunnel after nine months of treatment



Maisy Hoffman **THE BUCS' BLADE**

LOOKING OUT: In January 2014, senior Calvin Jager was diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He maintained a positive attitude throughout the long-winded journey and in late September he went into remission.

“Where does it hurt?” the doctor asked.

Senior Calvin Jager pointed to his left knee, the one with the quarter size bruise after slipping on the bathroom floor a week earlier.

Jager decided to have his knee examined when he noticed the pain persisted. His doctor proceeded to take x-rays and he reassured Jager that he would recover from the incident.

But then he paused.

The doctor saw something else. Something he wanted to ‘take a better look at’.

Jager and his family were used to the medical suggestion of ‘taking a closer look’ and returning to doctors’ offices for second appraisals.

In January 2014, the doctors at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital injected a needle into Jager's knee, took a biopsy sample, and confirmed the family's fear: the familiar osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer, appeared in his left femur.

This wasn't the Jagers' first experience with cancer.

In the fall of 2007, Jager lost his dad to a battle with brain cancer. In September 2011, his older brother, Jake, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, in his right femur. After almost a year of treatment, Jake went into remission and is currently cancer-free. However, the family's

relief was short lived.

But if there was a silver lining, it was that the family knew how to tackle this.

“We had a process of talking about the family history and talking about what my brother had went through and (the doctor) told me I was going to need a biopsy,” Jager said. “He had a pretty good guess that it would be the same as my brother because of the family history.”

The family was scared.

“It was a very heartbreaking and very saddening moment for sure, it was tough to hear that something you wouldn't wish on anybody was going to happen to your brother also,” said Jake, currently a sophomore at Grand Valley.

Despite the disheartening diagnosis, the Jagers were prepared to go through the next nine months with a positive outlook.

“I couldn't believe that we would be challenged to deal with a life threatening illness again,” Calvin's mom, Lorie said. “The good news was that having been through the same diagnosis before with Jake, I knew the things we needed to do, and some of the things to expect. I knew too much in some ways.”



Calvin Jager COURTESY PHOTO



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GO TEAM: (Above) While being in the hospital wasn't fun, it had its perks. Michigan State quarterback Connor Cook represented Calvin's cancer foundation at a football practice. Calvin and Cook became friends through a mutual friend prior to being diagnosed with osteosarcoma.

STANDING STRONG: (Left) Sporting an IV and typical treatment gear, Calvin's personality pokes through. He managed to keep a positive outlook during his journey.

Treatment began almost immediately and Calvin joined the cancer patient residents of the ninth floor. He'd be in and out of the facility for the next nine months.

"I would go in for about a week at a time and they would do chemotherapy which is basically like dumping poison into your body and it kills the cancer cells," Calvin said. "They put you up in a room and it seems pretty awesome because all these people are there to take care of you and bring you slushies and whatever you want, and then it gets later on in the evening and they start to hook up the chemo bags."

Calvin, whose blue eyes and bright smile mask the deep pain he had lived through, was comforted by the sounds of beeping and babies crying at almost anytime during the day. The staff, rooms, and equipment were interchangeable but his routine was set.

In the swing of things

Biweekly chemo treatments. Resting time in between as the mountain dew colored fluid flowed through his body. Home visits on the weekend.

"It was definitely scary but I went into it with the eye of the tiger and had to be strong for the family and everyone around me," Calvin said.

Despite the sense of order created

by the schedule, doubts and anxiety still gripped Lorie.

"The hardest thing for me as a parent watching my children go through this was watching them 'disappear' as the chemo was pumped into them," Lorie said. "Sleeping through the chemo was good because he slept through feeling sick, but it left me feeling very alone, and it provided too much time to worry about things."

Having been through the same process nearly two years before, Jake understood the family's concern.

Déjà Vu

"There's a lot of worry that all it takes is one thing to go wrong and all of a sudden you're in the ICU and praying for a miracle," Jake said. "Everyday is a battle, is the best way to say it."

Despite worries over worst-case scenarios, the Jagers knew what to expect since Jake's case was so similar.

"It was disheartening and at the same time relieving to know that I had been through a lot of what Cal had already gone through because it allowed me to give my own wisdom, my own insight to how to get through things- what works, what doesn't work, what to be prepared for," Jake said. "It felt kind of nice

to know that I had information that would be useful to him during his process that not many other people would be able to give."

After months of rising before dawn for doctor appointments, the day came for Calvin to check in to the hospital for surgery, where he was rolled into the operating room accompanied by worried thoughts, looming fears, and an empty stomach.

First step is the hardest

"I was nervous going in because I've seen what's going to happen but I've never experienced it myself so that's a whole new world," Calvin said. "I was worried about what it was going to be like after and how my leg was going to be different."

The foot-long incision ran from his mid thigh to below the knee and into his tibia. Forty percent of his femur was replaced by a titanium rod, and Calvin was given a new knee.

Although surgery was the scariest part of the experience, Calvin found the temporary immobility was the hardest part.

"It's a whole different world not being allowed to walk because you want to start the process of getting back into the swing of things but doctors say you're not allowed to," Calvin said. (continued on p.16)



Landon Hudson THE BUCS' BLADE

HOME AWAY FROM HOME: During the days, Calvin would often catch up on schoolwork and become friends with the other cancer patients on the floor.

Life at DeVos

Calvin shares how he spent his time during chemo treatment and recovery **By Landon Hudson**

While receiving treatment at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, Calvin spent most of his time on the ninth floor, the blue floor.

Each of the rooms were painted a relaxing shade of blue, but the rest of the circular layout was colored a bright, uplifting yellow.

On the outside, an optimistic and cheery tone carried throughout. Only the patients would know the sadness and pain that flowed within the small spaces.

"It sucked being attached to wires all of the time," Calvin said. "And chemo and being stuck in a room. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere and had to take meds."

Calvin tried to make the best of his situation and spending so much time at DeVos.

"It was bright and sunny because DeVos does a great job of making it look fun," Calvin said.

He was also able to meet some of the other floormates.

"I made a couple of very good friends who are still working through their battles on the floor," Calvin said.

One of the most rewarding aspects for him was to be able to establish these strong relationships with the other cancer patients.

"It was definitely cool to be able to work with them and help them out, I always saw it as my job to not think about my own but make sure they were okay," Calvin said. "It was a lot of thinking about other people to take the focus off of myself."

Calvin would also spend time catching up on schoolwork, but he yearned to be back on his regular routine.

"There were a couple of points where I just wanted to go home, I wanted to be with my friends," Calvin said.

He thinks back to his time in the hospital while being back in school.

"When I'm at school and I'm thinking 'Oh man I can't wait to get out of here', 'there's so much homework', 'it's terrible', I just have to remember and think that this is so much better than sitting at the hospital."

Calvin was able to keep a positive attitude throughout the process.

"It's definitely tough when you find out that you have cancer, but you have to come at it with the eye of the tiger and combat it with a good state of mind for sure," Calvin said.



Maisy Hoffman **THE BUCS' BLADE**

EYE OF THE TIGER: Calvin kept an optimistic outlook while in the hospital. He aimed to think and act positively to encourage and keep up the spirits of everyone around him. He constantly used the motto 'eye of the tiger' during his cancer process. "The eye of the tiger phrase means taking an approach to any situation with determination and strength," Calvin said.

Throughout the ordeal, the Jaeger boys managed to use their sense of humor to keep them going. Jake laughed thinking back to the moment when Calvin woke up from the six hour long surgery.

"I was right there and the first question he asked was 'Where are my pants?'" Jake said. "It's just those funny little things that I talk about. In times like that, the most important thing is to keep your humor light and funny and to keep everyone happy."

Support system

Besides Calvin's sense of humor, the support from his family and friends was even more important to him.

"My mom's definitely a trooper for sure," Calvin said. "It's a world that I know in the hospital. My mom's an inspiration to me, both my mom and my brother. My whole family is just awesome."

Despite his lack of mobility, one of the best surprises was when his best friend, senior Maxwell Vance brought Calvin's French Bulldog Lola to visit.

"Calvin and I have been close ever since

the first grade, we are family," Vance said. "Seeing him in that state made me very sad but the positive vibes he gives off makes you feel and know that everything is going to be okay."

The steady flow of visitors motivated Calvin to keep a smile on his face.

"My inspiration for it all definitely resided in my friends and the ability to power through," Calvin's said. I had to remember that people are looking up to me and that I need to be strong for them and show them a good example of how to combat this."

Two words, ten letters

In late September, Calvin was told the two words he had been waiting to hear: you're clear.

"It was a huge relief," Lorie said. "It felt like we had made it to the top of the mountain and could see our way down."

Calvin will receive precautionary check up x-rays every three months.

Over the course of the year, Calvin felt he missed out on some of the fun things his friends and class were doing. He was eager to

finally return to the life he had been waiting to live.

"I was really excited," Calvin said. "We had a big celebration and a kicking-chemo party which was very fun."

Takeaways and taking chances

Calvin also returned more mature.

"It definitely grew me as a person," Calvin said. "My maturity and my passion for life are definitely two things that I got out of this. While in the hospital, I was able to mentor kids who were newly diagnosed with similar circumstances. It was very cool to be an inspiration to them and help their families out."

The Jagers have been able to take away priceless life lessons from their multiple experiences.

"Not everybody's going through the same thing and I think that for me and for Cal that was a very tough lesson to learn," Jake

said. "Everybody's got their own path in life and the biggest thing to remember while you walk that path is that everybody's got difficult roads, some are just more difficult than others and you've got to respect everyone's path."

Calvin keeps this in mind as he makes the most out of his senior year and plans to attend Michigan State University in the fall.

"I'm definitely taking every opportunity I can and getting ready for college," Calvin said. "I worked very hard to get back on track with missing classes and stuff, and I was really excited because my goal and my dream was to get back to a point where I could feel happy

"My maturity and my passion for life are definitely two things that I got out of this."

--senior Calvin Jaeger

and feel like I belong at Michigan State where I wanted to go to college and I got my acceptance letter to MSU so it felt like all of my hard work paid off for sure."