

Omar Amin plays football for the University of Houston

SUGAR LAND'S FOOTBALL HERO

Omar Amin Battles Leukemia while Fighting for his Dream

Written by Carrie Bastin

Photos by Marisa Hugonnett

When Omar Amin first learned he had leukemia, his dreams of playing college and professional football were crushed. After making the Clements High School varsity football team his sophomore year, his fight against leukemia took him away from the sport he loved. But only 10 months later, he returned to the football field, continuing to fight for his dreams while fighting cancer. His perseverance earned him a spot on the University of Houston Cougar Football Team, as well as a spot in the hearts of those he has inspired along the way.

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COUGARS



Learning He Had Cancer

An athlete growing up, he excelled in gymnastics at an early age and became known by Ranger football fans for his signature flips in the end zone. He will forever remember one particular flip he made, after celebrating a touchdown he had just scored. Landing awkwardly on the turf, he fractured his collarbone, but weeks later, diagnosis revealed a more serious problem. Leukemia was to blame for the weakness in Amin's bones, which had led to his untimely fracture. Faced with tackling the illness, he received an outpouring of support and encouragement in the months that followed, with students, coaches, and teachers rallying around him. "Many times I would want to give up, but I'm grateful I had a strong backbone to keep me going in the right direction," Amin says.

A New Normal

He was determined to keep life as normal as possible through days and months of endless chemotherapy, spinal taps, and blood transfusions, but quickly realized his new normal did not include sustaining the rigors of his regular high school schedule. He only had to drop one class, though, and with the help of a tutor assigned by the school district, he was able to study from home while attending his beloved high school when his treatment schedule and depleted immune system would allow. Even still, he felt like he was missing out on so much that was important in his life. His good friends paid him visits, but it just couldn't take the place of the normal campus life he constantly longed for. At the lowest point of his battle with leukemia, Amin had lost 30 pounds and struggled with depression. Many days, he just wanted to lie in his room with the curtains drawn, wishing for his old life to return. "At his lowest point, he would look at his overly-thin frame and fail to believe in any hope of stepping on a football field again," says mother, Abla Amin.

Returning to the Field

With an inner strength, determination, and faith, Amin dug in, taking his recovery one hour and then one day at a time. Doctors said he wouldn't play football for two years, because his bones simply weren't strong enough to take the hits that football deals out. After two months of recovery, though, Amin began working out, strength training, and conditioning with the intensity of an Olympic athlete. One hot and humid August evening after thousands of prayers from friends and family and 10 months of aggressive treatment, he took to the field, to a background of applause, for one of CHS's first pre-season games. He continued his treatments through his junior year, playing special teams many times, as well as both offensive and defensive positions. Many times, he would have treatment in the morning at Texas Children's Hospital and play a game that very evening. It was commonplace for Amin to be throwing up between plays one minute, and tackling a runner the next. "Omar is one of the hardest working young men I have ever been around," says CHS Head Football Coach Keith Knowles. "He was going to give you everything he had regardless of how he was feeling."

Making the Team

Amin remained positive in his desire to play football at the collegiate level, working so hard his senior year he was named team MVP for the season. Several division II programs were interested in his abilities, but it wasn't until he visited the University of Houston that he realized he really wanted to have a shot at playing at a higher level while staying close to home. After attending a summer camp at the university, one particular coach showed an interest in him. He was elated when he got a phone call saying the school wanted him to try

out for the team and remained undaunted through early morning weight room sessions and grueling practices in the Houston heat, giving it his all. When he officially made the team and realized his dream had come true, Amin, his family, and friends were overjoyed. "I knew I could get over this and fulfill my goals as long as I kept my faith strong and my mind focused on what I wanted," he says, adding, "No isn't an answer for me. I had all the support I needed from my football coaches, friends, family, and the community."

Cougar Pride

As a Houston Cougar, he was red-shirted this season, but has practiced every day with the team and has four years of eligibility remaining ahead of him. It's been challenging for Amin to only watch from the sidelines on game days, but he keeps his sight set on next season, proving an inspiration to his fans who have encouraged him along the way. "Omar was an inspiration to those who were around him from the beginning of the diagnosis," says Brett Sniffen, Amin's position coach at CHS. "I am a better and stronger person since watching Omar go through recovery. He also served as a leader to his peers who saw him go through the low times and push through that to become the man who is at the University of Houston." If you know of someone with an inspiring story to tell, please email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com. SLM

CARRIE BASTIN lives in Sugar Land with her husband, Kevin, and son, Blake, who is a sophomore in high school at Clements. Her daughter, Shelby, is a freshman at Louisiana State University.

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