

To Live for the Game

After Beating Cancer, Chase Thompson Looks Toward the Future as an Athletic Trainer

From the bleachers, college basketball fans only get to experience the action on the court. They see 40 minutes of play.

That just doesn't satisfy Chase Thompson.

"I want to be an athletic trainer," said Thompson, a 20-year-old University of Idaho junior from Troy. "They arrive multiple hours before the ball drops and are there for hours afterward looking after the players. They get to go behind the scenes."

Thompson has always loved sports, but the decision to pursue athletic training started in spring 2014. That March, doctors diagnosed him with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He was a freshman in high school at the time and shooting guard on the Troy Trojans basketball team. And, although he went into remission roughly a month after his diagnosis, Thompson underwent chemotherapy for more than three years to prevent a relapse.

"I was a big sports person before cancer, and chemo took away a lot of my strength and stamina," Thompson said. "I figured that if I didn't get to play sports very much in high school or college, I could stay in the game by becoming an athletic trainer."

A high school senior project sparked Thompson's interest in athletic training. He shadowed the athletic trainers at U of I, attending Vandal basketball games, the spring football game and track and field meets. He witnessed the pre-game preparations and post-game activities needed to keep players at peak performance.

Additional Resources

[Learn about Athletic Training](#)

[Visit the Athletic Training Clinic](#)



Chase Thompson sits in the weight room in the U of I Student Recreation Center. After beating cancer, Thompson came to U of I to study athletic training.

Through his senior project, Thompson became familiar with the campus and well-acquainted with U of I's athletic training program. So he asked the [Wishing Star Foundation](#) — an organization that provides hope, memories and community to children and families battling severe illnesses — for help paying tuition at U of I. On hearing Thompson's story, Dan Davenport — who retired over the summer as director of student financial aid services — reached out to discuss how U of I could help.

"I said, 'We've got to do this.' It's just such a cool thing to do, especially after Chase's principal and the Wishing Star Foundation talked about how he was always such a positive person despite his struggles," Davenport said.

U of I offered Thompson a combination of scholarships that would fully fund his tuition and fees for four years. And in January 2018, during a Vandals men's basketball game at the ASUI-Kibbie Activity Center, the Wishing Star Foundation presented Thompson with tickets for he and his family to attend that spring's NCAA basketball tournament games in Boise. They also gave him a huge bag of basketball gear and other prizes.

"That was a big thing for me. I was not expecting it whatsoever, and then all of a sudden, I'm down on the court and they present me with this huge gift," Thompson said. "It was an exciting night."

Thompson is now living cancer-free. An exercise science and health major, he plays intramural basketball and hits the gym — which helps him de-stress. He is also active in the Theta Chi fraternity.



Chase Thompson and his twin brother, Heath Thompson, at the hospital on the day of his bell ringing for finishing chemotherapy.

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I was a big sports person before cancer, and chemo took away a lot of my strength and stamina.

— Chase Thompson, junior

After his junior year, Thompson will enter the [Department of Movement Sciences' Master of Science in athletic training](#) program, meaning he will graduate with both his bachelor's and master's degrees over the course of five years.

“The 3-2-year program will help me find a job because it allows me to get the proper training and experience that I would need to have to be an athletic trainer,” he said.

In the long run, Thompson wants to stick with basketball and work for either a professional or college team.

“Before he enrolled, Chase would always ask, ‘Is there some kind of catch? Is this really real?’” Davenport said. “For a long time, he wouldn’t believe it was happening. What’s nice about this institution is the people really understand the humanistic side of things and create opportunities for us to do special things for special people, and Chase has just been a great example of what a university student should be.”

Article by [Leigh Cooper](#), University Communications and Marketing.

Photos by [Joe Pallen](#), University Communications and Marketing, and provided by Chase Thompson.

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