



Christian's Story, by Jeff Graef

ASGFC First Kick Foundation's Kicks for Cancer honors Christian Graef and all children fighting cancer.



Christian joined Coach Greg Williams' ASG Gold West '98 Boys team over the summer around the time his family moved from Colorado to Texas. Christian has always had a passion for sports, and soccer has become his favorite over the last year. Joining Coach Greg's ASG team gave Christian a great head start on meeting a bunch of new friends, and made the transition from Colorado to Texas a little easier. After working out all summer and playing in the Beat the Heat tournament, Christian was excited about starting the season.

The first blow came the weekend before the Plano Labor Day Invitational Soccer Tournament, when Christian was diagnosed with blood clots in his neck and shoulder. He had to give up full contact practice and games while he was treated for ten weeks with a blood thinner to treat the clots. For a kid with a passion to play the game, and a strong desire to be part of the team it seemed like the longest ten weeks of his life. Despite the painful reminder that he was unable to play in games, or go full out during practice, Christian made nearly every practice and went to nearly every game to be with his teammates. Christian has always been an outgoing, generous kid, with a positive outlook. Despite all that was going on, he still showed up with a smile.

Christian was two weeks away from being back on the pitch when things took a turn for the worse. Mid October Christian began to experience some discomfort around his neck and shoulders, and then his cheeks and eyes began to appear a bit swollen. After taking Christian in to have the symptoms checked, the cascade of events moved rapidly. The X-ray showed a mass in his chest, he was admitted to the hospital the same day, followed by a CT scan, a biopsy two days later, multiple blood tests a day, needles of all sizes, doctors' exams, specialty consults, and finally five days later a diagnosis - cancer (anaplastic large cell lymphoma AKL+).

Less than ten days after Christian's fight against cancer began he had endured six days in the hospital, a spinal tap, surgery to install a port for his chemo, bilateral bone marrow biopsies, and two days of chemo therapy. By the end of November Christian spent nearly 20 days in the hospital for diagnostic tests, procedures, and chemotherapy.

During his first week of chemo in the hospital Christian's positive outlook and big laugh were hit and miss. The long days in the hospital, the 24- hours-a-day IV infusions were wearing him down. His soccer team checked in on him and heard he had hit a low point, and the next day the boys started coming by two or three a day. It made a big difference for Christian to know his ASG teammates hadn't forgotten about him, and that they were supporting him with visits and prayers. His chemotherapy treatments will last between four to six months, and the doctors have said that between hospitalizations if he feels strong enough he can practice and even play in his games.

All things considered, Christian is blessed to be near a top ranked children's cancer hospital. His doctors have given us great reasons to expect a complete cure for Christian and a return to doing all the things he loves to do, including soccer.

Christian has demonstrated a level of courage and tenacity that have helped him overcome the fear and anger that every cancer patient experiences. He is an amazing kid with a big heart, a sharp intellect, a great laugh, and a bright future.