NHL Star Brian Boyle Battles Leukemia While Still Playing

Boyle has chronic leukemia, which means his treatment will be ongoing “for the foreseeable future.”

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When the National Hockey League’s season kicked off earlier this month, New Jersey Devil Brian Boyle was back on the ice. Diagnosed with leukemia last year, the 33-year-old continues to fight the disease, PEOPLE reports.

In 2017, Boyle signed with the Devils. During training camp that summer, he began to feel very exhausted.

“I came back about a week early and was skating with the guys, but I was feeling really tired and slowed down and mentally feeling like I just didn’t care much for anything at that point, because I was just so exhausted,” he said.

Blood tests determined that Boyle had leukemia, a cancer of the body’s blood-forming cells.

Boyle immediately started treatment. But then news came that his son Declan might have Ewing’s sarcoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that forms in bone or soft tissue.

However, it turned out that Declan had an extremely rare arteriovenous malformation (AVM) in the jaw. (AVM is an abnormal tangle of blood vessels connecting arteries and veins that disrupts normal blood flow and oxygen circulation.) Declan had about 11 operations to remove blood out of his jaw and reduce swelling, but, Boyle says, now “everything looks good” for his son.

Boyle was tasked with balancing his own treatment while supporting his son during his procedures. On top of that, he was away from his family often while still playing through the hockey season. (He missed only 13 out of 82 games.)

Because Boyle has a chronic form of leukemia, his treatment is ongoing “for the foreseeable future.”

“It’s a really good prognosis, but it’s serious,” he said. “If you don’t take care of yourself and do the treatment as recommended, it can get worse, so it’s something that we’re very much taking

seriously, my wife and I.”

Boyle currently takes medication twice a day to attack the mutating cells in his body and has his blood tested regularly. He also no longer feels the physical effects of the leukemia.

“I’ve asked [when I’ll be in remission] and it’s years, like three years,” Boyle said. “I’m on the right track, and I’ve exceeded all these milestones, which has been really positive. But you want to be at all zeros across the board, so I think it’s at least a year before I can even think about what comes next.”

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