Kyle Smith — Check 15

Kyle Smith wants to help teach about the importance of early detection — check out his CHECK15 series!

June 29, 2018 By Justin Birckbichler

Welcome to the Band of Ballers! In this series on ABSOT, I'm turning over control to some other ballsy testicular cancer survivors and patients who have inspired me with their work in advocacy and awareness during and after their diagnosis.

This month's feature is all about Kyle Smith, who is the man behind the ball behind the brain of CHECK 15. He is also the first BOB feature I have actually met in real life (while I was at HealtheVoices18 in April) and he's the Lefty to my Righty! Enjoy!

When I was diagnosed with stage 1 testicular cancer at 27, I had hopes and dreams of becoming a professional juggler. But sadly this disease ended any fruition of that promising career, because after all, juggling with only one ball isn't very impressive.

Discovering I had testicular cancer

I first discovered two small lumps on my right testicle while innocently adjusting myself while sitting in my parents' hot tub. They were about the size of two peas (the lumps, not my testicles). I had no pain or any other symptoms. I monitored their presence for the next two days.

Then I ran the Chicago Marathon. 4 hours and 25 minutes—It's still my personal best. Not sure if I should give credit to the flat nature of that course or the lingering thought of possibly having cancer that drove me to run a little faster that day. But the main takeaway is that I was in prime condition and feeling perfectly normal when this all happened.

The next day, I saw my general practitioner, who sent me for a scrotal ultrasound (it's exactly as awkward as it sounds) and to see a urologist.

Just 10 days after finding those lumps, I was having a right radical orchiectomy (medical jargon for "nut removal"), but I knew I was in good hands because my surgeon was the same man who helped save my father's life just a couple years prior after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. One dose of carboplatin chemo, a lot of follow up scans and blood work, many more doctors touching my scrotum, and now, 5 years later, I am free and clear.

Why doesn't anyone talk about early detection for testicular cancer?

When I was diagnosed, I was aware of testicular cancer because of Lance Armstrong. Now, just like him, I only have one testicle and I too have technically never won the Tour de France.

Despite the press around celebrity cases like Armstrong or Tom Green, I did not know that testicular cancer was the most common cancer found in young men, and I had never been told to touch myself… for medical purposes. I mean, I guess I was never told to touch myself for other "purposes," yet I figured out how to do that on my own just fine, but that's beside the point. I was never told to do testicular self-exams. Not in school. Not by a doctor. Never. (Editor's Note: Yep, I found that too with my study.)

It's maddening to think that something so simple, yet something that could literally save your life would go so unmentioned. That's why after my diagnosis, I decided to use my skills as a filmmaker to attempt to inform people that they should be touching themselves and that early detection is one of our greatest allies in the fight against cancer.

So I founded CHECK 15: The Monthly Cancer Awareness Day

On the fifteenth of every month, we release a new cancer awareness video. (Editor's Note: Uniballers certainly love their specific days of the month. Remember Ken's #Takea2nd4theBoys campaign?)

Comedy sketches. Parodies. Music videos. We've now been doing it for the past 55 months straight.

Star Trek. Star Wars. Stranger Things. Twin Peaks. Game of Thrones. Fifty Shades of Grey. Ghostbusters. Jurassic Park. Various Christmas carols. Michael Jackson's "Thriller." Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball." (Editor's Note: "Checking Balls" is my personal favorite. Also, Kyle is too humble, but I linked to all of these while I was editing. Go watch each of them. Now.)

If it's a pop-culture touchstone, we've probably turned it into a cancer awareness video (or will one day). A lot of them are indeed ball related, but we also focus on other cancers — many of which can also be detected through self-exams or pre-cancer screenings.

We're attempting to harness the power of social media to inform the masses and much like that famous spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down, we're disguising that information with a healthy dose of humor. While laughter may not literally be the best medicine, it certainly helps ease the tension and make the subject more approachable.

55 months in and we still don't have quite the audience I would like, but despite our low views, I know for a fact that at least one friend detected his testicular cancer early because of what he learned from our videos. It's encouraging to know it's working, but it also means we could help more people with more exposure.

Doctors and scientists couldn't give me a reason for my disease. So I made the creation of CHECK 15 my reason. I put forth all the tools I have learneadvavavavd from over a decade's worth of

industry experience in Los Angeles to make high quality products on low budgets. We also get to work with some incredibly talented filmmakers, actors, and musicians, who donate their time because they believe in our cause. I truly believe in the power of learning while being entertained and engaged creatively. Stimulating both sides of the brain leads to better retention of information. So if we can make cancer awareness PSAs enjoyable to watch and instill humor into an otherwise grim topic, then I think we can make a difference in people's lives and encourage them to be more proactive in their health.

So go… Watch some of our videos. (Editor's note: Seriously… do it.) Maybe even share one from time to time. You never know who in your life could be in need of this information.

And of course… don't forget to touch yourself.

Be sure to connect with Kyle by visiting him at CHECK15.ORG, facebook.com/CHECKfifteen, twitter.com/CHECKfifteen, or instagram.com/CHECKfifteen. Until next time, Carpe Scrotiem!

Know someone (or even yourself!) who is supporting TC awareness and would be willing to share their story? Drop their name, contact, and why they should be featured into this Google Form and I'll reach out to them and/or you!

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