That Time 235 Men Grabbed Their Balls in Public

November 14, 2017 By Justin Birckbichler

I went to college at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. While I almost transferred out of there after my freshman year, I ultimately decided to stay and I'm so glad I did. It became a huge part of my identity (including my current hairstyle), helped me find some of my best friends (read Brett and John's HBA posts here), and led me to the path I'm on today.

Since graduating in 2013, I've been back on campus a handful times to speak at the request of my college professors about different topics in education. On November 6th of this year, I once again found myself on Shippensburg's campus to speak to a group about an educational topic, but this time the balls I was focused on weren't my classroom's yoga balls. I spoke to a room full of men planning to do the largest simultaneous testicular self-exam for a world record attempt.

In 2010, a group of 208 men in the United Kingdom did a simultaneous self-exam and are the current record holders (as of this writing). Jason Greenspan, a fellow testicular cancer survivor and soon-to-be Shippensburg University graduate, decided to break this record. Jason and I initially connected through Instagram when I noticed one of his pictures was taken in the Rec Hall at Shipp.

While texting in the midst of my chemo, Jason asked me if I would speak at his Ship's Got Balls event. Full disclosure - this was in the height of my chemo brain and I don't recall this conversation, so I'm glad he messaged me again closer to the date to ask me again. This time, with a more normal brain, I was amped up and ready to help.

I didn't want to just share my cancer experience at this event; I wanted to weave my story in with a call to action. My ABSOT post "No Time for Excuses" fit the bill, so I began reworking it into a speech. In true form, I made sure it contained numerous ball-related puns. Sometimes, I amaze even myself that I haven't run out of phrases to show how nutty I am.

At the event, Jason organized a "mingle room" with a No Shave November event (which I've discussed the importance of here) and other fun, social activities. There were TV reporters there, and I got to talk about the importance of balls on live TV - check out the segments on FOX43 and Local DVM!

Around 8:00, we shifted into the event room. Jason started with opening remarks and shared a bit

of his story. I was struck by how similar our stories are (finding a lump through random chance at the peak of our lives, having to endure surgery and chemo, and coming out with a desire to spread awareness), although he was diagnosed at a much earlier age than I was.

After he spoke, Bruce Levy, a retired high school principal and another survivor, came to the stage to share his journey. His story was much different than Jason's and mine - he had a lot of pain and other symptoms (irregular bowel movements for one, a problem I never have) before being diagnosed. I think it's good to share that not all roads start the same, but each testicular cancer survivor ends up riding a unicycle at the end.

Then it was my turn to talk. While I've spoken at numerous educational conferences, including a keynote in front of about 300 people, this audience was significantly different - a large gathering of frat boys. Nonetheless, I had a mission to do and I began sharing my story, along with the common excuses I hear. I had to be on the ball from the start.

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