

## S Patrick Chung



### **The wristband that links Patrick Chung, 10-year-old battling cancer**

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FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- The 10-year-old boy with the charming smile, colorful hat and heavy black brace on his right leg waited at the rope that surrounds the New England Patriots' practice fields, leaning into crutches to keep him upright.

Jack Berry of Missoula, Montana, wasn't supposed to be here. He didn't want to be here. But everything changed so suddenly about five weeks ago with a life-altering medical diagnosis: osteosarcoma, a solid tumor of the bone.

Yet, as veteran safety Patrick Chung approached him, the 30-year-old was uplifted by the youngster's presence.

"He wasn't down. He was smiling. He was happy. He didn't seem sad about it," Chung recalled. "For a kid, that's hard. As adults, sometimes things happen and we complain, it's a natural thing. But for a kid to not complain, and keep smiling, that goes a long way with me."

Chung offered his football gloves. In turn, he received a blue-and-green "Jack Strong" band.

Chung accepted, but with one request: Please sign it.

As parents Cooper and Kate Berry watched the exchange unfold, they savored it as a moment of light in what has been a time of chaos and fear for their family of five.

"Instead of him just doling out autographs, he took the time to say, 'Wait, I want this kid's autograph.' That was my favorite part -- that Patrick Chung wanted Jack's autograph," Kate Berry said.

Chung promised he would wear the band until it snapped. Two days later in the Patriots' preseason opener against the Washington Redskins, as Jack watched from club suite 11, it was still on Chung's left wrist.

"People think we just play football, but how I was brought up is that we all bleed red, no one is better than anyone. When people are going through things, you want to help them," Chung explained.

Jack has been going through a lot, and this week has been especially tough, with another round of chemotherapy treatments at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. This wasn't the way he expected to be spending his summer. He had planned to be doing all his favorite things -- playing hockey, mountain biking, hiking, whitewater rafting -- before returning home to the triple bunk bed he shares with brothers David (age 8) and Patrick (5).

On July 11, not long after he was dropped off at summer camp in Missoula, where he was excited to embark on a two-day backpacking trip, Jack felt a piercing pain in his right leg, almost as if he was hit by a baseball bat.

Kate had just returned to the family's home about 15 minutes away when she received the call from a camp counselor. She quickly returned and took Jack for X-rays at an urgent care facility. When the doctor entered the room to relay the results, Kate, who is a nurse, could tell immediately by the look on his face that something was terribly wrong.

The diagnosis was osteosarcoma.

"One of the things we've asked doctors is, 'How does this happen?' We've lived the healthiest life. They just said, 'Bad luck, that's it.' The likelihood of it is like one in a million," Kate said.

The Berrys then had to decide where Jack would receive medical care, with Seattle, Salt Lake City and Denver among the options. They chose Massachusetts, in part because of the world-renowned Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Boston Children's Hospital, but also because that's where they would have the most family support.

Cooper grew up in Simsbury, Connecticut, which is located about 12 miles outside of Hartford, and his brother, two aunts, one uncle and a godmother all reside in Massachusetts, as does a friend who volunteered use of a van. The family has been staying at the home of one of Cooper's aunts since arriving in town about one month ago.

A family connection also is what led them to Patriots practice last week, as Cooper's brother, Will, had coached Patriots assistant Steve Belichick in high school. On a 100-degree day with thick humidity, Jack watched practice from the family and friends VIP area, met some cheerleaders and waited along the rope with others in the spot that coaches and players walk past on their way from the fields to the locker room.

Bill Belichick, among others, stopped by to say hello, and Jack didn't mention that back home in Montana, most teammates on his hockey team are Denver Broncos fans. Then there was the meeting with Chung.

"He was more talkative and friendly than I expected out of a professional sports player," Jack said, smiling.

Added Cooper, "We were in the 'no autograph' section, no pictures, so we clearly weren't trying. He handed over his gloves and said, 'Do you want me to autograph them?' He didn't have a pen, so he went down to where everyone was clamoring for autographs, took a Sharpie, and brought it back to sign. They just made a connection."

The connection was highlighted the following day, when Chung held a news conference and still had the "Jack Strong" band around his left wrist at the dais.

The next day, when the Patriots hosted the Redskins in the preseason opener and Chung made two tackles on the opening drive, Jack took note that Chung -- whose jersey he purchased at the team's Pro Shop before the game -- was still wearing it.

"I was really surprised, because a few times people have said they are going to wear a band and then it never really follows through," Jack said.

Chung, who has a 7-year-old son Taj, received a token of appreciation from the Berrys a few days later when a "Jack's Army" T-shirt was delivered to him after practice.

"Jack's Army" is the name Kate's co-workers in the neonatal intensive care unit came up with to answer Kate's call for support, and they bought screen printers to make the T-shirts in their homes. Among others, "Jack's Army" includes family, doctors inspiring them, Cooper's fellow firefighters -- who selflessly keep picking up his work shifts -- hockey teammates from the Missoula Bruins sending countless videos of their shaved heads, coaches who shipped his No. 84 road jersey to be by his bedside, and now Chung.

Of his meeting with Jack at practice, Chung explained that he sensed something special about him. Specifically, his positive outlook and resiliency stood out.

Cooper and Kate, who first met as students at the University of Montana, have been touched by Chung's gesture.

"His kindness was so sweet," Cooper said. "And then you watch his highlight reel and it's so fierce."

As it turns out, Chung and Jack are linked in another way, with Chung set to celebrate his 31st birthday on Aug. 19, and Jack turning 11 on Aug. 20.

By that point, Jack will have been through two rounds of chemotherapy since arriving in Boston. The family is anticipating being in town through at least April, with his medical care including learning to walk on a prosthetic right leg after a rare rotationplasty surgery, according to Cooper.

Prior to the second round of chemotherapy this week, Jack said, "I feel a lot better than I did, but I still feel pretty nervous about what's coming up. It does seem so big still."

It is, with an empathetic gesture by his new favorite football player providing a ray of light in hopes of easing the burden.

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