

RINGO: Former CU Buff Alex Ligon has so much to fight for on Father's Day

Camera staff Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Alex Ligon found out he was going to be a father last fall. He was thrilled beyond words.

Last month the former Colorado defensive end learned he has an unusual form of Leukemia that had already spread to more than 50 percent of his bone marrow, and suddenly he was left wondering whether he would make it to Father's Day, let alone the birth of his daughter who is due July 12.

After a week of feeling under the weather dealing with nose bleeds and swelling in his feet and ankles, he decided to go the hospital one night on a whim instead of going to watch a Denver Nuggets game with family. He thought he had allergies and doctors nearly sent him home with allergy medication, but they decided to do blood tests first.

The decision might have saved his life. Doctors told him after several days of tests that he probably would have lived another four to six weeks if he hadn't sought answers.

Ligon has received and delivered hundreds of smashing blows on the football field and he has served his community as an Arapahoe County Sheriff's deputy working jail duty for four years, but those tough guy roles were nothing compared to handling nasty chemotherapy treatments, bone marrow tests and hours and hours of time to sit and ponder what he has done with his 27 years of life and all he still wants to do with his wife and daughter.

A hospital room, unless it is in labor and delivery, is no place to celebrate Father's Day and Ligon won't have to.

After 32 days at Saint Joseph Hospital in Denver -- from May 7, the day he received the bad news, until earlier this month -- Ligon is at home today with his wife, Abbey, hoping to hear his doctors tell him in the coming week that his cancer is in remission.

He hasn't held his first child in his hands yet or kissed her tender forehead, but there aren't many dads celebrating their day with their kids today with more depth of appreciation for it.

"As soon as he said the word Leukemia, I kind of sunk in my seat and was like, 'Wow. So this is how it's going to do down, huh? This is how I'm going to go out,'" Ligon said. "It was a very, very tough pill to swallow. I still can't wrap my head around it. It was kind of surreal. I couldn't think straight. As soon as he said the word, it was just everything went blank and all I could think of was leaving Abbey behind and leaving a baby behind and not being able to be there for both of them. That was kind of what was going through my head and it was really, really hard at first."

Ligon met his wife at a party when both were sophomores at CU in 2004. She has been by his side ever since, including every day of his hospital stay despite being so late in her pregnancy -- the

most uncomfortable days and weeks -- with doctors and nurses suggesting she should go home.

"I think we were both trying to stay strong for each other," Abbey Ligon said. "I didn't want to break down and make him think that things weren't going to be OK, and he didn't want to break down because I'm pregnant and he didn't want me to fear the worst. One night he did break down and said, 'I don't care about me. I just care about you and the baby. I want everything for you guys to be OK.'"

The Lignons say they have been overwhelmed by the support they have received from family, friends, former CU teammates and Buffs fans. Alex Ligon said two of his former teammates, in particular, have gone out of their way to help, John Guyton and Matt McChesney.

Doctors told Ligon they are able to put the disease into remission about 85-90 percent of the time with his specific type of Leukemia, Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia, through chemotherapy. The treatments produce side effects he described on his blog this way, "sea sick, flu like symptoms, a real bad Vegas hangover, with a mule kick to the gut."

But those odds have boosted his optimism and lifted his spirits from those first dark days in May.

Regardless of whether his cancer goes into remission, Ligon faces several more months of chemotherapy treatments, though these will only last an hour a few times a week and he can drive home afterward. His first round of chemotherapy lasted a full week, 24 hours a day.

Beyond the chemotherapy, he will likely have to take medication for several years and make adjustments to his lifestyle to continue fighting off the disease. Ligon said he always has wanted to be a father and he's looking forward to watching his daughter grow up.

"That has given me an added push to kind of fight harder and change my lifestyle a little bit," Ligon said.

"It sucks that he has this, but it really puts things in perspective," Abbey Ligon said. "I think him being young, it's kind of a blessing. Hopefully when all of this is over with we can change our lives and do things a lot differently than we would have cause we learned early that life isn't guaranteed and you never know how long you have."

As a father, Ligon will soon have the pleasure of cleaning up all manner of exotic messes created by his bundle of joy. He will get little sleep and stress out not knowing how to soothe a baby who seems determined to cry. He will deal with anxiety about providing for his daughter and whether he is teaching her well. He will see safety hazards where once he saw only stairs, cupboards and electronics.

He will give her a million kisses and they won't seem nearly enough. With luck and blessings, one day he will see her graduate from college and he will walk her down the aisle.

He can't wait, but he couldn't be more thankful that he has the opportunity to be a dad.

Those who would like to donate money to help the Ligon family with medical expenses can do so at Rally.org/Ligon. For updates on Ligon's fight, read his blog at <http://alexligon51.wordpress.com/tag/alex-ligon/>

Duluth News Tribune

Published June 16, 2012, 03:14 PM

Women's USA Half Marathon: Duluth native Kara Goucher wins with course record (with video)

Duluth native Kara Goucher, who will run the marathon at this year's Summer Olympics in London, won the USA Half Marathon Championships women's race today, setting a course record in 1 hour, 9 minutes and 46 seconds.

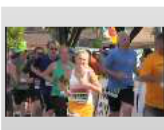
By: [Rick Weegman](#), Duluth News Tribune



Kara Goucher
wins women's U...



Top finishers at
Grandma's Mara...



Garry Bjorklund
Half Marathon si...



Near the finish line, a fist-pumping Kara Goucher finally was able to show what returning to Duluth meant to her.

Goucher, who will run the marathon at this year's Summer Olympics in London, won the USA Half Marathon Championships women's race today, setting a course record in 1 hour, 9 minutes and 46 seconds.

"I had to try and shut my emotions down during the race because I was trying to get something out of this race and prepare for London," the 1997 Duluth East graduate said. "But there were times that people were telling me very personal things like 'You ran the (4x400 relay) with my daughter.' It's hard to tune that out.

"When I came down Superior Street with two miles to go, I literally had goose bumps because people were cheering so loud. Every elite athlete dreams big dreams when they are growing up, and for me to come here on my way to the Olympics, I couldn't have asked for anything more."

Goucher, runner-up Maegan Krifchin and Lindsey Scherf ran the first five kilometers together before Goucher eventually pulled away to win by 70 seconds and break Colleen De Reuck's course-record time by 14 seconds.

For Goucher, who resides in Portland, Ore., with her husband, Adam, and son, Colt, it was a good step on her way to the Olympics later this summer. Upon changing coaches from Alberto Salazar to Jerry Schumacher of the Oregon Track Club, Goucher said, that unlike training partner and fellow Olympian Shalane Flanagan, she never finished one of Schumacher's workouts leading up to the U.S. Olympic Trials.

"Shalane always went at least a mile, if not 11, 12 or 13 miles further than me," Goucher said. "But I do every single step with her now. I went through a very weird period last summer — I had my son, I wasn't sure what I wanted anymore, I was injured and I knew I wanted to change but didn't know if that meant not running anymore. By the time I found a new coach, I had let myself go a little bit as far as an elite athlete goes. I had put myself in that position and was holding myself accountable. I've been healthy since then and now am on a level playing field with everyone."

Goucher, whose best marathon time is 2:24:52 at the 2011 Boston Marathon, is hoping for a time in the low 2:20s in London.

"I feel like I'm a different athlete now," she said. "I'm not confident that I could break 2:20, but with help — and in a marathon there would be a lot of help — I feel like low 2:20s is realistic."

On Saturday, her main help was an adoring crowd.

"It was tough because everyone on the road was cheering for Kara and I don't think anyone knew who I was," said Krifchin, who set a personal-best time of 1:10:56. "As I was running by, the crowd was going wild and crazy for Kara. And that's great because it's her hometown and I respect that, but it's hard to hear that.

"But even though they were cheering for her, hearing the emotion and joy from the crowd helped me, too, and pumped me up. Whether it was my name or Kara's, it was getting me motivated."

It's a long time removed from when Goucher used to hand out water to runners on London Road, and wonder why anyone would ever run 26.2 miles.

"I never thought I'd run the marathon; I thought it was crazy," she said. "A lot of my friends would run the half marathon, which was just starting, and I thought they were crazy."

Goucher described the weekend as the high school reunion she never had, having missed an actual East reunion due to running another race, and she is forever appreciative of the support she receives from her hometown.

"This community has embraced me forever — since I started running when I was 12, almost 22 years ago — and they've been there for me through it all," she said. "For me to come back and do this, it's the best way I can thank them."

Tags: canal park, grandmas marathon, news, sports, sports, updates, marathon, running, duluth, fcnetwork