



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



A new baseball jersey over his shoulder, Reece Brown stands watching a game at Sterling's Ronnie Kluch Baseball Field after two heart surgeries that have sidelined the left-handed pitcher for this baseball season.

RSS Baseball Player Sidelined After Heart Surgeries

Baseball season has always been Reece Brown's favorite time of the year. He loves everything about it - the sound of the cleats, the pop of the glove and, most of all, the camaraderie among his teammates as they work together to field a win. As baseball begins this year, however, this Ross S. Sterling High School sophomore won't be playing. You might say he's had a change of heart.

During a routine dental exam in August 2015, Reece's blood pressure was extremely high, so he went to Texas Children's Pediatrics in Baytown and was sent to a kidney specialist in Houston. After a kidney scan showed no problems, an echocardiogram was performed immediately. Much to their surprise, Dr. Sara Sexson, the cardiologist, gave Jackie and Keith Brown some bad news about their son's health. Reece had a bicuspid valve, a coarctation or narrowing of the aorta and an aortic aneurysm.

Dr. Sexton told them that Reece had had the leaking



Reece Brown (back), former Stephen F. Austin Elementary student, receives a t-shirt from Team Under Armour 4th graders, making him an honorary member of their squad, at SFA's recent Jump Rope for Heart event. Pictured are (l to r) Mason Lockett, Cameron Sustaire, Bailey LeJeune, Landon Michulka, Landyn Harmon, Brown, Cliff Gammel, and Preston Jackson.

Six weeks after the second surgery, it's hard to tell that Reece has ever had a problem. When Stephen F. Austin Elementary, where his mother teaches, recently held the

valve and the coarctation since birth, but it had never been diagnosed. He had always seemed healthy and had played baseball since the age of 4. The aneurysm was another major issue, since it could have ruptured at any time. All medical terms aside, the young athlete had been a walking time bomb.

"We were shocked, scared and upset," said his mother. "Reece was immediately told he would not play baseball again or do many activities because of his leaking valve and aortic aneurysm. This is tough news to take as an active 15-year old boy."

Fortunately, they were also told that his condition was treatable, and it was this thought - and an amazing amount of prayer - that has gotten Reece through his two surgeries with a positive attitude.

"I had a lot of support from my friends and family, and I had a lot of faith, knowing that people were praying for me," said Brown.

The family also had faith in his surgeon Dr. Joseph Coselli at St. Luke's Hospital in Houston. In fact, Jackie was comforted in that he was noted as one of the top surgeons in the U.S. for this type of heart condition. Reece's first surgery September 23, 2015, repaired the coarctation. The incision, which curved from halfway down his left side up to his shoulder blade, made for a difficult recovery, especially since he had trouble moving his arm. Recovery from his second surgery January 14, 2016, which repaired the aortic aneurysm and left him with a mechanical valve along with the typical zipper-like scar, was quicker. There's no doubt that Reece's positive outlook on his situation has made this easier on the entire family, including sister Ashlyn, a Sterling graduate, who was also checked for heart problems and, fortunately, received a clean bill of health.

Jump Rope for Heart event, sponsored by the American Heart Association, Reece felt well enough to make an appearance. The 4th grade students on Team Under Armour presented him with a team shirt as an honorary member of their group.

"I felt like a celebrity! I was the SFA Heart Hero," said Reece.

Not all teenagers would want to share their medical history, but Reece hopes his story might help someone else or at least make others aware that this could happen to anyone. He knows this diagnosis probably saved his life.

"I think that it might help someone else going through something like this to know that I made it through it and am still active," said Reece.

Although Reece's stamina is not quite back to normal, he's been coming out to cheer on his Sterling baseball teams and is ready to be released to go back to school after Spring Break. Only time will tell what the term "normal activities" will mean for Reece, but he's planning to start slowly and see how it goes.

"I definitely want to be active, lift weights and do everything that I used to do, but there are some risks due to the blood thinner I take," said Reece.

According to his mother, the big question is whether or not he will go back to playing his favorite sport.

"That is up to Reece," she said.

Until it's time to make that decision, Reece's coaches will be happy to have this left-handed pitcher back in the baseball class, helping out the team however he can.

"No matter what Reece decides, he'll always be welcome as part of our Sterling baseball family," said Adam Shibley, head baseball coach.

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