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Ulman Forms Fund To Battle Cancer

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This begins as a story about a young soccer player who battles cancer. But it ends up as something much, much more. For most of his 19 years, Doug Ulman led a charmed life. His athletic career began at age 6 in the soccer hotbed of Columbia, Md. He starred on defense at Centennial High School, earning three state championships and a selection to the all-South team. He was student associate to the Howard County School Board, president of the Howard County Association of Student Governments and a member of his high school human relations team. He played on the Maryland Olympic Development Program team for six years, and made it to regional camp once. He entered Brown University as a freshman in 1996, the same year new coach Mike Noonan arrived. The future seemed limitless.

Ulman saw little action his first year, but knew his role would grow as a sophomore. He trained hard all summer. But last Aug. 7 - just days before preseason camp - he felt a pain in his chest after running with his older brother. X-rays revealed an abnormality; 24 hours later a CAT scan showed a golf ball-sized tumor near his lung, ribs, and spine. Ninety-eight percent of such growths are benign, but test taken after it (and a portion of his rib) was removed showed it to be malignant chondrosarcoma, cartilage cancer. His doctor recommended replacing part of his spine with a metal rod- surgery that would end his soccer career forever. Ulman was stunned. His mother drove him to Brown, where he met with Noonan and team. He put on training gear, went out to the field - and watched his teammates practice.

Dr. Alan Levine, a Brown alumnus, advised against surgery, based on the 65-70 percent chance that the cancer would not recur. Happily, Ulman agreed. In last September he began practicing - and on Oct. 7 Noonan sent him into a match against an almost-hometown team, Loyola of Baltimore. He played 25 minutes of the 3-1 win, and felt great. But the cancer had exacted a physical and emotional toll, and he was unable to play the rest of the year.

Ulman's story took an even more inspirational and important turn a few weeks later. He saw an ABC-TV "Prime Time Live" show in which cancer survivor Sam Donaldson described the lack of funds available for research. Ulman called his parents, and devised a plan. They formed a fund aimed at helping young adults who have cancer or whose parents or siblings have it. But the Ulman Fund of the Wellness Community-Baltimore is more than a direct mail appeal. The first event, in June, was a \$100-a-plate banquet at Pimlico Race Course. Dozens of items were auctioned. Sam Donaldson, Cal Ripken Jr. and Brady Anderson donated memorabilia. The U.S. national team (which trained at Brown the past spring, before their match against Mexico at Foxboro Stadium) gave an autographed ball. John Harkes sent an autographed jersey. Thousands of dollars were raised.

Yet the banquet was not the main event. On Aug. 1 at Howard High School, a spectacular college all-star game will raise even more funds. Thirty NCAA Division I players will compete. The roster includes stars from the Columbia area, and around the country. "I wanted my friends, my teammates, guys I've played against, and guys I respect," Ulman said. The cast he has lined up represents not only the top players nationwide, but the brightest ones, too. There are nine players from Brown (including former Parade Magazine Player of the Year Josh Anderson of Bethesda, Md., and Andy Dixon, flying in from Colorado); six University of Virginia Cavaliers (including Ben Olsen, Scott Vermillion and Brian West); Chad Evans of Wake Forest University; Matt Laycock of the University of North Carolina, who trains with the U-18 national team; players from Yale, Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Pennsylvania, Maryland and South Carolina, plus several veterans of last year's U-17 national champion, Columbia United. Of course, Ulman will play too.

The banquet and game became a full-team job for Ulman. He spends several hours a day making phone calls, writing letters, dealing with sponsors and arranging the countless details that go into such an effort. The goal is to raise \$50,000. By mid-spring, the Ulman Fund had collected half that. Six figures is not out of reach. But that is not the end of the story. The Ulman Fund will soon begin dispensing money, then organizing more events for 1998. Ulman also plans to write a guide-book for young adults with cancer, full of information he wishes he had last year. Because at 19 he was legally an adult, he had to sign his won medical releases and make his own decisions. That was a tremendous burden for a young man who had never been sick in his life.