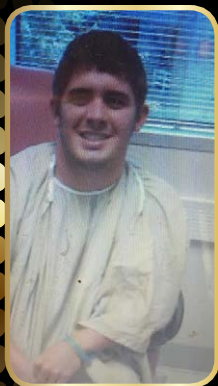


2017 Best Self Atlanta Magazine Courage Award Finalist

RICKY BENSON

BEFORE



AFTER



Ricky Benson is a very modest person. He has been working out since he was in high school and lives each day with an immense passion for bodybuilding. To me, inspiration is when life throws you an unexpected curve ball: you can catch it and throw it back with more power and courage than you ever thought you had. For example, if fitness is already an established part of your life and some unforeseen circumstance came into play that would take that away from you, how would you cope?

Ricky was in college when he felt a lump that was painful to the touch. He contacted his parents and they scheduled to have it checked out the day before Thanksgiving. It turned out to be cancerous. He was in shock and his family was devastated. The financial, emotional and physical strain was almost too much to bear. He would have to have it completely removed. On Thanksgiving Day he went in for surgery to eradicate the cancerous mass. The following months would be the hardest and longest of his life; countless radiation treatments, fatigue, nausea, inability to eat, as well as giving up what he loved - bodybuilding.

The day after his surgery his mom found him in his bedroom doing push ups! A few days later he was at the gym doing bench presses! Not the smartest idea, but no amount of pain was going to keep him from the gym. This revolutionary moment in his life is what led him to pursue a career in nursing. He finished his college career with a Bachelors in Nursing. Over the next few years he trained like never before and decided to finally enter a bodybuilding competition in 2014. Even though he was working 12 hour shifts in the ICU, Ricky went in with the goal of winning. He ended

up placing 2nd overall in the novice category, in a very stacked class. After that he made a vow to do the same show again next year and win the overall Jr's. Class. In 2015, Ricky came back to the NPC Mid-Atlantic Classic bodybuilding show and did just that! He went on to compete in the 2016 NPC NC State Championships, where he did bodybuilding and crossed over to the new Classic Physique category. He placed 3rd in the heavyweight bodybuilding class and 2nd in Classic Physique.

Ricky was not far from winning overall. The major improvements he made are remarkable when you think about all he's gone through. As his fiancé, I was so deeply moved by his commitment and it just made me love and respect him even more. He doesn't let cancer define him. In fact, most people don't even know that he ever even had it. He isn't known to be "that guy who had cancer", but he is recognized as a "bodybuilder". It is the sport of Bodybuilding that drives him and the amount of dedication, commitment and discipline he shows, reflects just that.

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**He doesn't let cancer
define him.**

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I just wanted people to know his story. Ricky epitomizes the idea that cancer doesn't have to control you. Through courage you can overcome it and at the same time, inspire others to follow their dreams.