

CHRIS' STORY



Challenge
supporting kids with cancer

At the age of 12, Chris Gordon accepted that his dream of playing AFL football would never be realised. His hope that a cure or a new miracle drug would be found for the life-threatening blood disorder Haemophilia that he had been born with, had not come to fruition and the game was getting too rough and risky for him to play. Instead, Chris made the decision to stick with the game he loved so much, but in a different capacity – as an umpire.

In 2006, Chris was awarded the Chris Wise Education Scholarship, which he used to further his skills in what he hoped would become a full-time career. That same year, Chris was selected to umpire the TAC Cup Under-18 Grand Final.

The stellar year umpiring at VFL level in 2008 saw Chris rewarded with umpiring duties in the VFL Grand Final at Telstra Dome, which then led to an even bigger reward, in the form of a contract to umpire in the AFL.



How did the Chris Wise Scholarship and Challenge help in you becoming an AFL umpire?

The scholarship enabled me to purchase better running shoes for training and my games as we wear them out quite quickly.

The quality running shoes were better for my legs and feet to cope with all the running. Challenge always supported me through, from the time I first started umpiring, then at the VFL and now AFL. Challenge did a lot for me when I was little that I will never forget. Their support was very valuable to me.

Why did you apply for the Scholarship?

Because I was under 18, my parents had to drive me all over Victoria in local and VFL football as well as having to buy my shoes for those levels. I wanted to help them out a little bit and buy my shoes to take some pressure off them and that is what the Christopher Wise scholarship helped me with.

Would you encourage others to apply? Why?

Yeah definitely, it's something that no matter who you are or what you do, you can use the money to purchase better

things or equipment that will help you later on in achieving whatever you want to achieve. It takes the pressure off you and your family and allows you to continue focusing on the goals you want to achieve without worrying about how much things cost.

What's the plan for the future?

Last year in the VFL, I achieved all my goals that I had set for myself. I umpired the state game over in South Australia, finished off the year with the VFL grand final at Telstra Dome and an AFL contract.

Each year I set new minor goals and my goals are to work hard, have a great first year of AFL and umpire at least 15 AFL matches in 2009. My long-term life goal is still to umpire in an AFL Grand Final and to get to the illustrious 300 AFL matches.





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To get there took a lot of hard work, through AFL accreditation programs, VFL matches, local senior Grand Finals, and VFL and TAC Cup Grand Finals, but Chris was prepared for that.

Background

Chris was born with Haemophilia, a severe blood disorder that was deemed life-threatening at the time. Today, children diagnosed with the illness have medical advancements to thank for the fact that it is no longer life-threatening. It does, however, affect the lifestyle choices of those living with it, and at times can limit what activities they can participate in.

Haemophilia is a bleeding disorder in which the body does not make enough of the essential clotting factors we need, either Factor VIII or Factor IX.

Bleeding is mostly internal, usually into the joints or muscles. These bleeding episodes, or “bleeds”, may occur spontaneously (apparently without any cause), or as a result of trauma (injury). Bleeding can be stopped by infusion of the appropriate clotting factor by intravenous injection. If internal bleeding is not quickly stopped with treatment, it will result in pain, swelling and damage to the tissues. Over a period of time bleeding into joints and muscles causes permanent damage (such as arthritis in the joints) and chronic pain.

Good chance at a full and active life

His parents Margaret and Lindsay, although initially devastated at the news, realised that Chris would still have a good chance at a full and active life.

Throughout his playing career, Chris had to be extremely careful while playing, and made coaches and players aware of his illness from the early days, “so I never had any problems, they were all great.”

“After my final year of Auskick, when I was 12-years-old, I was told that I was not allowed to play anymore, which was pretty upsetting. I definitely kept trying to get out there with my mates, and I kept trying to persuade my parents that I’d be careful but it never worked and the doctors always said no! Finally I realised that despite all of the pleading and hounding I was doing, they were never going to change their minds.”

A positive young man

Rather than sit at home and sulk about the decision, and being the positive young man, and passionate football fan that he is, Chris decided to direct his attention towards an alternative. After considering being a runner for the Melbourne Football Club, he stumbled across the “next best thing” – umpiring.

In this field, he has excelled since he first headed to his local umpiring league and was taught the basics. By umpiring, the risk of injury is far less than with playing football, with the only real danger being “the possibility of regular injuries that everyone can sustain, such as hamstring and calf damage”. His parents and doctors are far happier with that!

The ‘G’ on Grand Final day

In 2006, Chris completed the highest honour for a first year umpire in the VFL and umpired the TAC Cup under-18 Grand Final. “It was played at the MCG on AFL Grand Final morning, and it’s the best experience I’ve ever had in my career. Being out on the ‘G’ is one thing, but being there on Grand Final day is something really special. By the last quarter of my game there were at least 25,000 people in the crowd and the atmosphere was amazing.”

Chris’s advice to kids with Haemophilia who may be worried about playing sport

“Don’t let Haemophilia drag you down in any way. Sport is one of the best things to do for your Haemophilia as it helps the muscles around the joints get bigger and stronger, resulting in less bleeds. The most important thing is to let officials and the mates that you play with know of your condition, then just get out there and go for it”.

