

# Washington Football Team THINK-PINK® Celebration



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Breast cancer stories from Washington players

Ron Rivera surprised with decal

13th annual All-Star Survivors Celebration



# Breast Cancer Awareness Month gets personal for many Washington players

By Hannah Lichtenstein

**W**hen the pink of October is splashed across end zones, social media posts and T-shirts, Terry McLaurin can't help but feel a tug. It's a little stronger this month compared to the other eleven. The pull this month asks him to sit with her memory — Betty McLaurin's memory — a little more.

"Breast cancer is very near to my heart. My grandmother on my dad's side passed away from breast cancer," the wide receiver

said. "Every time this month comes about, it makes me really think about her even more and the current cancer survivors who are going through it, the ones that are battling it each and every day."

McLaurin is one of many players on the Washington Football

Team personally affected by the ravages of a disease that affects 1 in 8 women in the United States. For these men, Breast Cancer Awareness Month isn't just a cause they feel obligated to talk about because they're professional athletes in the spotlight; this month is personal.

That connection has motivated them to use their powerful platforms to deliver important information to breast cancer survivors and their loved ones.

If there's one piece of knowledge that all those touched by breast cancer wish they could send a million times marked with a high priority flag, it's the message about the significance of early detection.

"Early detection can be life-saving," long snapper Camaron Cheeseman said. "If you don't find out about it before it gets too severe, it can be too hard to treat."

There's a reason Cheeseman

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## BCA

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scored in the 92nd percentile of the Dental Admissions Test -- he's a smart guy, and he's right about early detection. According to the American Cancer Society, when breast cancer is detected early, and remains in a localized stage, the 5-year relative survival rate is 99%.

Catching breast cancer early means getting screenings routinely. However, for millions,

booking an appointment with a doctor and taking advantage of vital tools like mammograms may seem like a luxury reserved for the privileged.

"The best way to continue to bring awareness to breast cancer is obviously what we're doing [at the Washington Football Team], but also making it available for all women to get routine check-ups no matter their status, no matter their economic background, their race, their anything," McLaurin said.

Though early detection

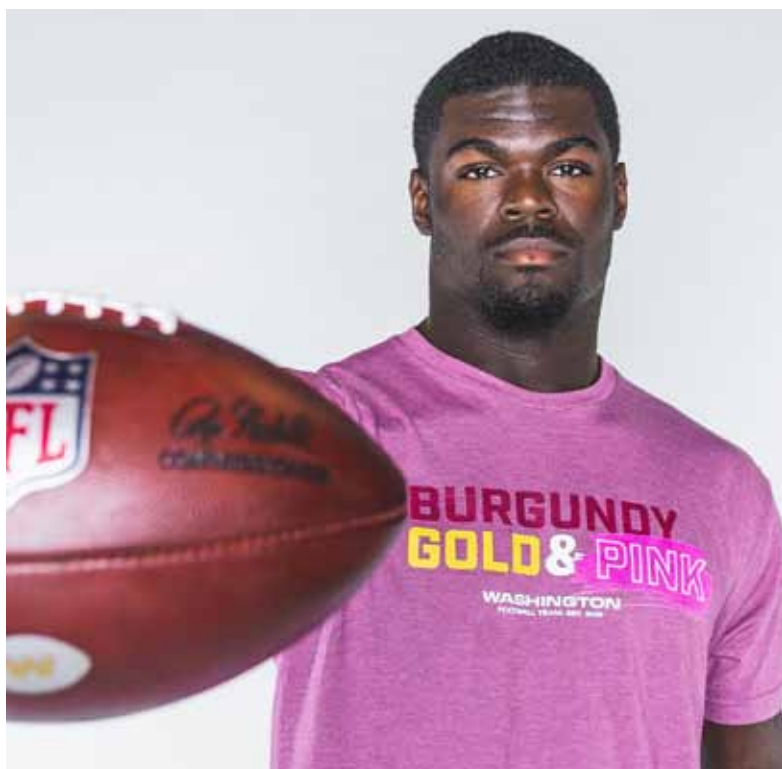
awareness and medical resource access are potent weapons, they cannot prevent breast cancer. Until we find a cure, this cancer will indelibly impact lives. Many will see it as perhaps the toughest experience they have ever faced. When that happens, Logan Thomas, whose grandma Shirley Thomas is a breast cancer survivor, preaches the necessity of steady support.

"My support for my grandmother just came from constant communication -- letting her know that I was always on her side, that I

was there for her," the Washington tight end said. "I knew there was going to be tough days, but I knew how strong she was and I was just trying to be strong with her."

It's a strength that can be hard to muster at times, but when it flows with its full fierceness, it is indescribably profound.

"The courage and the fight that you're displaying right now, you can't put into words what it means to your family, your supporters and your loved ones," McLaurin said.





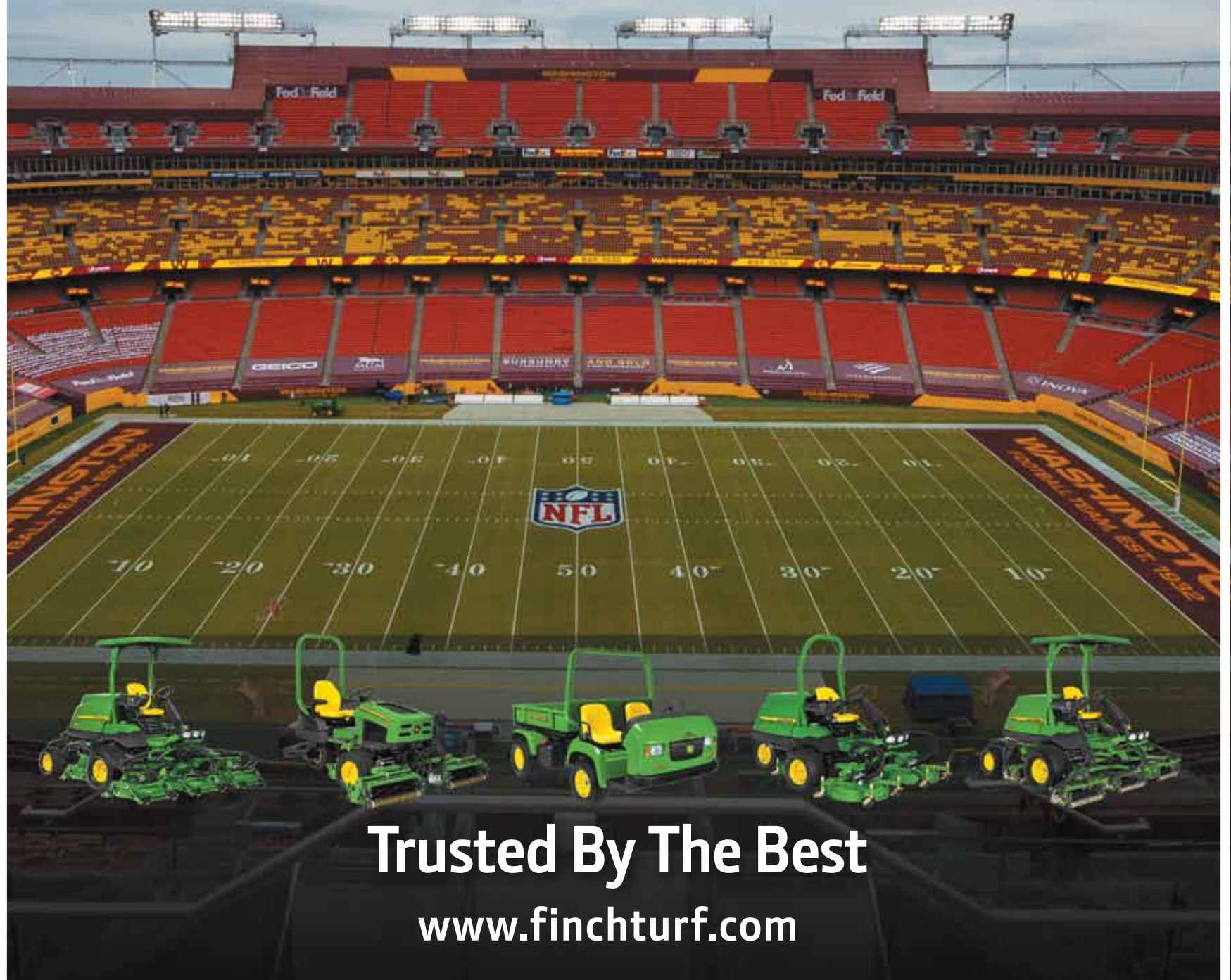


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# Ron Rivera surprised with decal and a donation to St. Jude in honor of being 1-year cancer-free

By Zach Selby

**O**n Aug. 20, 2020, Ron Rivera announced that he had squamous cell cancer. On Tuesday, the Washington Football Team's head coach received a biopsy confirming he is still cancer-free.

To say that the past year has been difficult for Rivera would be a drastic understatement. He underwent long, grueling hours of treatment during the first portion of the season while coaching the team from a 1-5 start to a playoff appearance. His determination and perseverance in a battle for his life did not go unnoticed by the organization.

In honor of Rivera's victory over the deadly disease, his players

surprised him with a "Rivera Strong" decal featuring the bell he rang after his final treatment that was worn during Washington's Week 4 game against the Atlanta Falcons.

The team also presented Rivera with a \$25,500 donation to the St. Jude Red Frog Events Proton Therapy Center.

"As a coach, you always wonder if you get a chance to reach out to the players and touch them," said an emotional Rivera after watching a video announcing the decal in a team meeting. "This was awesome, man. Thank you."

"Seeing him overcome each and every obstacle is just an incredible feeling," Brandon Scherff said. "We're proud to represent him."

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## RIVERA

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Rivera first spoke with ESPN's Adam Schefter to announce his diagnosis. He admitted he was "stunned" when his doctors first informed him because he felt like "I'm in the best shape I've been in."

Rivera was also assured by his doctors the cancer was "very treatable and very curable."

"I'm very fortunate," he told Senior Vice President of Content and Media Julie Donaldson. "There's been a very high success rate, and so I fall into that category. There's an opportunity for us to take care

of this and be able to go forward."

Rivera continued to coach through his treatment, which was recommended by his doctors. He was told to work at "a smart pace" and follow the protocols.

able to play fast and go out there and make plays," Jon Bostic said, "it really spoke volumes."

Rivera has had unwavering support from the team throughout his treatment. He only

**Rivera continued to coach through his treatment, which was recommended by his doctors. He was told to work at "a smart pace" and follow the protocols.**

"To see somebody go through what he was going through and still show up on an everyday basis and bring the energy that he was bringing ... watching film, giving us tips to help us on Sundays and be

missed two practices and was on the sideline for every game. His fight was a constant inspiration for his players.

"I was at a loss for words, just seeing how Coach Rivera never

complained," Chase Young said. "He came to work every day. He gave me more energy to say, 'Okay, Coach Rivera is going through what he's going through. He's still coming to work. We've gotta pick this up for Coach Rivera.'"

The fact that Rivera has been cancer-free for a year shows Deshaun Everett "how much of a warrior he is." Not only did he work through his treatment, but he also provided support for Everett and his teammates. Rivera's fight served as a constant example of the messages he preaches to his team.

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# RIVERA

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“To see him go through that,” Everett said, “it makes us fight that much harder.”

On Oct. 26, 2020, a video was released of Rivera proclaiming his final treatment was complete by ringing a bell, a common act for those receiving treatment for cancer. There was still a long road ahead, but it was a monumental step.

“I think everyone would

agree that he had the right...to be able to complain and feel bad for himself and nobody would have even thought twice about it. But he didn’t,” Jonathan Allen said. “He pushed through it, he worked hard. He controlled his actions, his attitude. I just think he’s a shining example for what we should strive to be on and off the field.”

Montez Sweat said Rivera’s journey “lit a fire” under his and the rest of the team and pushed them to give more effort in everything they did.

“It was definitely a motivation for the whole team,” Sweat said. “It was just an inspiration for somebody like that, our leader, to go through something like that and actually make it out the other side.”

The decal worn by the players is a symbol to honor Rivera, but it’s a way to raise awareness for other survivors and others fighting cancer.

“It’s a sign of strength to see all that Coach Rivera went through, to know that we may not understand all that he went

through and other cancer survivors, but that bell represents a big milestone in the fact that he finished his treatments and he’s doing a lot better than he was then,” said Terry McLaurin.

There’s another message the players want to send to Rivera with the decals. They want to thank him for being the man he is and how he handled himself during his treatment.

“You were still the pillar that we could rely on,” Logan Thomas said. “So congratulations, and thank you.”





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# 13th annual All-Star Survivors Celebration kindles unforgettable experiences, connections for breast cancer survivors and their loved ones

By Hannah Lichtenstein

**C**hristine Rupert stopped eating her pumpkin cheesecake and set down her fork. Reaching to slightly pull down the collar of her black turtle-neck, she revealed her upper chest spotted with burns. These are lingering byproducts of the breast cancer treatment Christine finished just days earlier.

For the 52-year-old mother of one, the burns are sores to be celebrated, not wounds worthy of preventing her from relishing the treasured experiences of Washington's Breast Cancer Awareness month events. In the immediate lead-up to the "THINK-PINK®" game against

the Saints, in which Christine and 29 other selected All-Star survivors were to be honored, loved ones expressed concern about the sores and questioned whether she should go.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything," Christine said of Washington's "THINK-PINK®"

scene of tens of thousands waving pink and white rally towels, wearing pink ribbons, and enjoying the festivities of a football Sunday at a stadium just a few dozen miles from where she finished her treatment.

Days later, looking ahead to Washington's annual All-Star

event was established to support and celebrate women like Christine whose lives have been affected by breast cancer, and their families. Throughout the day, All-Stars were treated to lunch, make-up consultations, and spa services and took home various goodies, including new jeans from Gap Inc., custom Color Bar jewelry from Kendra Scott, and Washington Football Team gift bags. For these women and their loved ones, the event provided a cherished opportunity to connect with other survivors and create joyful memories in the midst of hardship.

Each All-Star carried a unique story into the resort's ballroom at the All-Star Survivors

**For these women and their loved ones, the event provided a cherished opportunity to connect with other survivors and create joyful memories in the midst of hardship.**

game. "My best friend was like, 'How are you going to go with those burns?' I'm like, 'I don't care. I'm going. I don't care about the burns.'"

So, she went, taking in the

Survivors Celebration on Oct. 12, Christine's mentality was the same: she wasn't going to miss it for anything.

Hosted at the Lansdowne Resort & Spa, the All-Star Survivors

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## SURVIVORS

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Celebration. Some had relatives who also had breast cancer, while others had no family history of the disease whatsoever. Rupert found a rash she initially shrugged off. Rosemarie Poole had a lump first mistaken for a clogged milk duct. Carla Geter just had a bit of soreness. Yet, every one of them got news -- at lunch with her daughter, in a

**Washington's deep and authentic care towards this cause stems from a very personal place. Washington alumnus and former All-Pro tight end Chris Cooley launched this annual tradition with the Foundation in 2008 after his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.**

gown at Washington Radiology, outside her apartment carrying bags of groceries -- that forever changed their lives. Since hearing

that "C-word," every one of them has broken down in tears, felt their body struggle and watched those they love grapple with the

disease alongside them.

Christine Rupert's daughter, Jackie, couldn't help but grin watching these women, bonded by their specific yet common experiences, all come together at the event.

"It really just gives them an opportunity to make friends with people who share the same kind of situation as them," the 21-year-old said. "It's really nice, and it's touching to see that there's so

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# SURVIVORS

From page C13

many women here and they can all come together and make a really crappy situation seem really great.”

Attention to the little details played a big role in the mission to make these women feel special. That extra level of awareness left an impression on JJ Jackson.

“Just coming in and seeing the football with my name on it, you know, and a gift bag, it was just like, ‘Oh my God. They really care,’” JJ said.

Washington’s deep and authentic care towards this cause stems from a very personal place. Washington alumnus and former All-Pro tight end Chris Cooley launched this annual tradition with the Foundation in 2008 after his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. He saw how the family struggled to cope, how she fought to beat this disease, and the toll that a double mastectomy and radiation treatments imposed.

Washington’s co-owner and Co-CEO Tanya Snyder, who has continued this event and developed additional programming for Breast Cancer Awareness with the team over the years, is also a breast cancer survivor who was diagnosed in 2008. Mrs. Snyder’s presence and influence on the day earlier this month, as a woman who knows first-hand about the emotional turmoil of this journey, was significant for Poole.

“Mrs. Snyder has been in our shoes. She understands what we are going through and continue to go through and I’m just glad that she has that platform where she can bring it out into the open and she brought us all together,” the two-time cancer survivor and mother of four said. “I’m just thankful that she’s able to help us share with each other.”

Meeting the other All-Stars was also a highlight for Carla Geter, a former law enforcement officer who was diagnosed in January 2021. Carla is in the process of getting two major surgeries many of the women she met at the celebration have also undergone. In April, Carla had a double mastectomy. At the end of this month, she will have reconstruction surgery.

She looks ahead to that milestone now with a bit of new



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gratitude and a boost of bliss thanks to one special day.

“Everything was great. From

the being pampered to the food to the meeting everybody to seeing the former players, it was

just amazing,” Carla said while fighting back tears. “I’ll never forget this.”





# All-Star Celebration Gallery





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