

# Duckett: Teacher, Cancer survivor

By Sydney Edwards  
Editor-in-Chief

Trent Duckett, social science teacher at Mattoon High School, is a father to two twin girls, a husband to a Mattoon Middle School teacher, a coach for MHS's football and girls softball team, and, in order to accomplish all those feats -- he is a cancer survivor.

Duckett was a newly engaged man when he was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma the summer before his senior year of college at Concordia University in Wisconsin. It is a cancer of the lymph tissue affecting the spleen, lymph nodes, and any organs in the immune system.

"I was working out one day, when I noticed that I couldn't reach my left arm up over my head. When I checked my armpit, I noticed I had a good-sized lump," Duckett said. "At first, I was hesitant to get it checked out. I was, however, pushed by my family to get it checked out."

Duckett, then, went to a regular doctor and was sent in for a biopsy.

"After surgery, the doctor came in and said that he expected that it was cancer. They took a lymph node that was the size of three eggs out of my armpit," Duckett said.

He began his chemo treatment the next week.

One person that was there for Duckett through his treatment was Cayla Duckett, math teacher at MMS, and his then fiancé.

"I think that the whole experience brought us together and really [made us] appreciate one another," Cayla said. "I think that it has really helped us both to be grateful for what we have right now. You never know when things can change."

During Duckett's fight with cancer, he never stopped playing baseball for CUW.

"I continued to play on my summer and college baseball teams for the remainder of the time going through treatment. My conditioning was not as good as it had been, but I feel very blessed to have had the strength and mentality to push my way through the disease," Duckett said.

Cayla said she thinks baseball was a way for Duckett to relieve some frustration he felt towards cancer.

"He played in a summer league and for his university. I think that he used pitching to release some of his anger towards the diagnosis, but it also allowed him to forget about it and just live in the moment. Kind of like one Chemo treatment at a time, one pitch at a time," said Cayla.

He continued to be involved with sports after college, and joined the MHS staff as an assistant softball and football coach.

"He always wanted to be a baseball coach. When the assistant softball position opened up, he thought it would be a great opportunity to still get to coach the sport he loves. I can tell that from the start of him coaching softball he has the same passion for it as he did for baseball," said Cayla.

Duckett's passion and journey with cancer has helped with his competitive nature as a coach.

"I think it does help me realize that it is just a game, and there are much more important things out there, but if you run into me on the football field on Friday, or a doubleheader at the softball complex on a Saturday, I hope I seem ready

to do all I can to help my team win," Duckett said.

Fellow football coaches and physical education teachers at MHS, Jarad Kimbro and Troy Johnson, said his passion and competitiveness for the game drives his coaching.

Duckett's cancer has also helped him with his outlook on teaching.

"I think that my teaching style reflects my personality, and cancer did help to shape who I am, so it did change the way I teach. I do try to teach life lessons. In my opinion, that is the most important part of being an educator," said Duckett. "It doesn't really matter what side the Ottoman Empire fought on in WWI (Central Powers), but if I can teach kids to enjoy life and work hard at whatever it is they want to do, and then I have successfully completed my job."

After he has taught all he can to his students and figured out all the strategies at practice for the day, Duckett comes home to his 2-year-old daughters, Marlee and Mallo-ry. Duckett not only learned how to be a good dad from cancer, but he learned from his father, as well.

"Being a good husband and dad is probably one of the most important things in my life. I learned a lot from my dad, and I am glad to say that he is my best friend. I still call him every night just to talk about my day. I hope that I can be like that to my kids. The one thing that I think of when I think about my girls, is that without cancer, I wouldn't have them," said Duckett. "I strongly believe that things happen in life for a reason. Not all things are good, some people lose their battle and others win. I can't explain why that happens, but there is a reason, and maybe the reason I survived was to help others, and that is what I will continue to do."

The way that Duckett helps others is through teaching, coaching and speaking or participating in Relay for Life. Duckett and Cayla are both from the small town of Shelbyville, Ill. and said they went to the Relay for Life just for fun before Duckett was diagnosed.

"We always make it a priority to go and support others in both Mattoon and our hometown, Shelbyville. Prior to Mr. Duckett having cancer, we would attend our hometown's Relay for Life, because it was something fun to do in a small town," said Cayla.

After Duckett's journey with cancer, he was asked to speak at both Shelbyville and Mattoon's Relay for Life.

"School Board President Michelle Skinlo asked me if I would be willing to speak. I had spoken at the Shelbyville Relay for Life a few years before, so I said that I would be glad to. The tough part of the assignment was coming up with the right stuff to say to people that really don't know who I am. It was much easier in Shelbyville because in a small town most people know who everybody is," said Duckett. "I did enjoy the opportunity to speak, and was very happy to see a lot of familiar faces from the schools, both teachers and students, there to support me. I think any time my story can help inspire or help in the search for a cure for cancer, I can face the fear of stage fright."

While Duckett spoke at these events, it never stopped making Cayla feel proud of her husband, nor did it stop impacting her emotions.



**Top Left:** Mattoon High School social science teacher Trent Duckett talks to Emily Bacino, sophomore, during a lesson in class. **Bottom Left:** Duckett teaches one of his classes. He currently teaches World Cultures, Ancient World History and Modern World History. **Bottom Right:** Duckett and his wife, Mattoon Middle School math teacher, Cayla Duckett, walk around the path at Peterson Park at Relay for Life with their 2-year-old daughters Marlee and Mallory. Duckett is a cancer survivor and attends Relay for Life every year, as well as being a guest speaker at Relay for Life in Mattoon and Shelbyville in past years.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MHS RIDDLE



"I was a little prepared for last year's [Mattoon's] Relay for Life speech, because he had given a speech at the Shelbyville Relay for Life the year before. Of course, it makes me tear up when he talks about it because it was such a scary part of our life. When you are that young, you don't think things like cancer can happen to you," said Cayla. "It also makes me happy that he talks about it, because there are so many other people in our community going through it, and maybe his story can help someone

else." Cancer has affected Duckett's life from coaching, to teaching, to being a dad, but his faith was the main thing that kept him going.

"My family has instilled in me a strong Christian faith, and I feel that believing in something and having a positive outlook on the situation is really what gets people (both families and patients) through the battle with cancer," said Duckett.

As his faith kept him going, his sports mind also helped him com-

plete his cancer journey and win.

"I am not going to lie and say that I am now some perfect person that never thinks a bad thing and always looks on the bright side. It did definitely affect the way that I look at specific things," said Duckett. "I try to go out and enjoy the sports that I like to watch and play like football, baseball and golf. I still like to win, and can't stand losing. That may be a reason why I was able to fight through cancer. It was a competition to me, and I wasn't going to let it beat me."

# FUN FACTS

## WORD JUMBLE

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**HINT:** Every company uses some form of this?\*

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\*Fact from 2010 Offset Lithography Technology Book.  
\*\*Winners of game need not be present to win. One entry per student. Employees of Mirror newspaper and Mattoon High School are not eligible to win.

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