

# In It *to* Win It

College baseball catcher Heath Pugh and his team up on and off the field *By Tracey Neithercott*

Sam Houston  
State University  
catcher  
Heath Pugh.

## coach Chris Berry

CHRIS BERRY WASN'T supposed to play ball. At age 7 he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, which, his family physician said, would best be kept under control if Berry led a sedentary life. No sports. No tag. No horsing around. "But I was an active kid," he says today, at 34. "I kind of lived my life the way I was going to live my life. I didn't live scared of activity for very long."

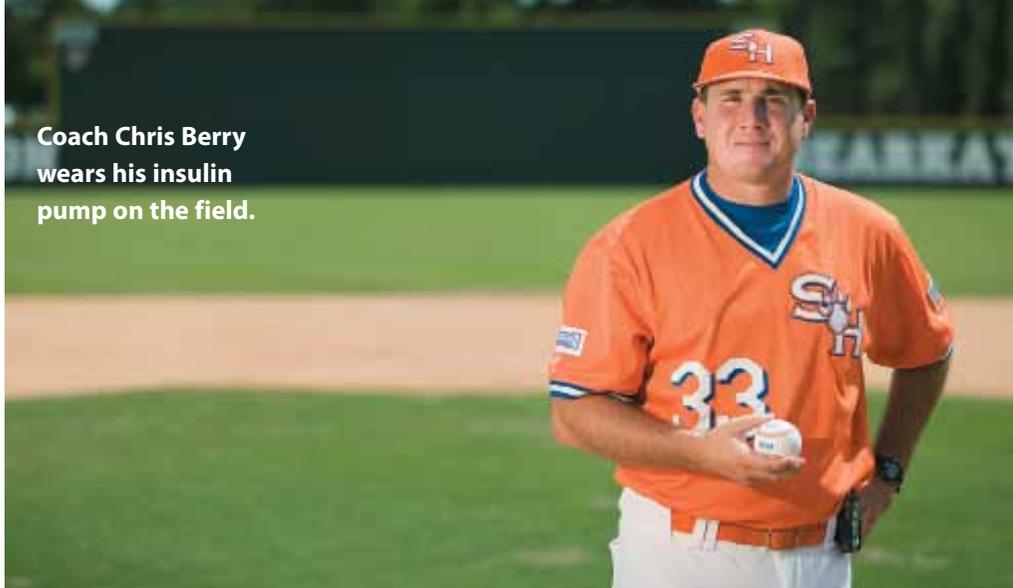


PHOTOGRAPHS

*baseball field:* ROCKY KNETEN

*heath pugh:* CLARK MISHLER

**Coach Chris Berry wears his insulin pump on the field.**



In defiance of his (former) doctor's prescription, Berry took up baseball, playing in little league, high school, and college. By 2000, he was assistant coaching for Baylor University in Texas. That's where he met Heath Pugh.

Berry was punching the buttons on his insulin pump. Practice had stopped for lunch, and hundreds of kids in baseball caps had started to file into a Baylor University meeting room. Pugh was one of those wide-eyed high schoolers attending Baylor's baseball summer camp with aspirations of making it

Huntsville, Texas. By then, Pugh was a college junior and starting catcher for the Sam Houston State University Bearkats. Berry, fresh from a pitching coach stint with Arkansas State University, was the lat-

Beyond learning baseball skills, Pugh picked up tips on living—and playing—with diabetes.

"We kind of have a different type of relationship," says Pugh, referencing a player-coach bond

## In many ways, Berry is Pugh's greatest supporter. "When see him get glassy-eyed and no one else can. I'll say, 'Hey, Heath,

to the majors some day. But Pugh had one hang-up with the sport: He worried that roughhousing on the field would damage his two-week-old pump. His father spied Berry programming a bolus, and the two struck up a conversation with the coach. By the end of his talk with Berry, Pugh was ready to take his pump on the field.

It was a matter of chance that, after parting ways at Baylor, the two reunited seven years later in

est assistant coach recruit. "It's kind of weird that I ended up here as his coach. Completely random," says Berry, who's been with the Bearkats for a year.

It didn't take long for the two to forge a friendship. For Pugh, Berry became a role model. He had endured the rigors of playing baseball before insulin pumps, managing game-time travel by injecting insulin while his teammates slept. He had experience checking his blood glucose 19 times a game in the corner of the dugout. And he had purchased a pump (when he finally tired of compensating for an unpredictable schedule) before Pugh was ever diagnosed. By the time Berry cinched the Sam Houston State job, he had amassed invaluable knowledge about being an athlete with type 1 diabetes. And Pugh took note.

that goes beyond the field to topics like meal replacement shakes, infusion sites, and ketones. "I know that if he ever needed anything he could call me, and if I ever needed anything, I could call him. I know that he's always looking out for me."

In many ways, Berry is Pugh's greatest supporter. "When we're running I can see him get glassy-eyed and no one else can. I'll say, 'Hey, Heath, you need to rest,'" says Berry. "For me, as a player, I didn't have a coach that knew what a person with low blood sugar looked like. So I would push, and I would push. For Heath, he knows he can go as hard as he needs to go and know that 'I've got someone who's got my back.'"

### **From Diagnosis to the Diamond**

Heath Pugh was standing in his



CHRIS BERRY: ROCKY KNETEN; HEATH PUGH: COURTESY OF SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

## The College Years

### On your own, but not alone

Going to college means Mom and Dad won't be there to look over your shoulder anymore, which may sound great (late night parties!) but it also means it's time to learn to take care of yourself. Still, there are some important ways you can reach out for help, and it's best to do so before you hit a rough patch.

**Buddy up.** It's a good idea to have an ally who knows about your diabetes. Find someone—a coach, advisor, roommate, or close friend—who you can count on for encouragement and support, especially in an emergency.

**Study up.** Learn your rights and your college's legal obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Post-secondary schools are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments—such as granting extended time for completing an exam if you experience hypoglycemia. That said, your college isn't required to make substantial changes to essential academic requirements.

**Look it up.** Contact your school's disability office and become familiar with its adjustment process and required documentation.

**Speak up.** Unlike elementary and secondary schools, colleges are not mandated to identify students with disabilities. You're not legally required to disclose your diabetes to anyone, but you can't seek academic adjustments unless you tell your school about your diabetes.

**Stand up.** There is no requirement for the school to invite parents to participate in the 504 process. Instead of relying on your parents to advocate for you, you should start taking responsibility for your own health.

**For more information, visit**

[www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html) or call the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES.

backyard practicing for the day's baseball tournament when it happened. He had steadied a ball on the tee, choked up on the bat, and started to swing. "It looked like the ball was doing circles on the tee," he says. "My dad said, 'What was wrong with you?' I said, 'Dad, I can't see the ball!'" A trip to the hospital confirmed that Pugh had type 1 diabetes. He was 14.

Over the next several months, Pugh went from injecting insulin three or four times a day to wearing a pump. "I was very concerned

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you need to rest."

when I got on it," he says. "I was like, 'Man, this is like wearing a pager with a tube attached to you.'" But once he overcame his fears of destroying the device while playing ball, Pugh started pumping while playing sports—even pound-you-into-the-ground high school football.

During games, the small gadget sits at his hip. When he first started wearing it, some spectators thought it was a beeper or a small radio used to correspond with the dugout. Now, most people understand its use. Others recognize the plastic box as a sign of hope that they, too, could tag a runner out at home base if they wanted to.

And even though Pugh refuses to acknowledge that he's a role model, young athletes are looking to him for guidance. At a conference tournament with

Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., Pugh was introduced to a middle schooler who had been having trouble with his pump. After talking about the ins and outs of pumping for a half hour, the two exchanged numbers. They still keep in touch. And at a game against Southeastern Louisiana University, Pugh met with a high school student in town who used a pump but didn't think he could play football with it. "He was kind of scared about breaking his pump," Pugh says. "I said, 'Go for it.'"

"I can remember when I was first diagnosed. I was 14, but it was like I was 6 years old again. My mom was watching over me," says Pugh. Since his diagnosis, Pugh—now 21 and starting his senior year—has been on a mission to prove that type 1 kids can be active, too. "Just let the kid be a kid. They don't have to sit inside and play video games. Diabetes is not a setback at all. It becomes who you are. You learn to live with it."

When asked what the most difficult part about being a baseball player with type 1 diabetes is, Pugh answers, "It's just become a part of my life. It's just who I am. I don't know what the hardest part is."

Berry has a similar take. Twenty-seven years after his doctor announced that he would never be active again, Berry says, "If you learn to take control, [diabetes] doesn't have to slow you. It has not stopped me from doing anything I wanted to do." ▲

