

When Taylor High School graduate Dallas Griffin was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, he began training for the BP MS 150 bike race to help raise funds and awareness of the disease

TO AUSTIN FOR DALLAS

**Former THS and UT football star
Dallas Griffin battles MS and rides
to Austin to raise awareness**

*Written by Meagan Clanahan
Photography by Emma Rose*

“Dallas is equipped with a maturity and spirituality to face this disease. With a great support system around him, he’s ready to adjust and do what it takes to beat this.”

– Bill Lane, former Taylor High School football coach

Growing up as an accomplished student-athlete in Katy, Dallas Griffin rarely confronted any trials that could not be overcome with a little hard work and sweat. The Taylor High School graduate and former Mustang football player has lived a blessed life full of extraordinary experiences, like the chance to play college football for the University of Texas Longhorns. So it was with great surprise when Griffin first heard the news of his potentially devastating diagnosis at age 26: multiple sclerosis. Now, determined to live a full, healthy life, he makes time to train for the BP MS 150 bike race from Houston to Austin and raise funds for the life-altering disease.

Katy's Friday Night Lights

As a 6'4" talented center for the THS football team, Griffin earned many accolades during his high school years, including all-state, all-district, and senior captain honors. A well-rounded and brutally strong athlete, he also placed first and third in the shot-put and discus events during the Texas 5A track and field championship in 2003. But football was always his first love, and not just because of the lure of playing under the bright Friday night lights. "High school football was special, because of the camaraderie and brotherhood," Griffin shares. "It wasn't so much the games that I remember most, but the hard work we all put in working towards a common goal."

He recalls fondly the Katy community's support of all things football. "It was exciting to play against all of the Katy high schools with so many talented players, and then for the fans to show up every week," he says. "It was like an extended family."

Yet even with the recognition Griffin earned, it came as a surprise to him that he could score a scholarship to some of the top football colleges in the nation. Griffin remembers the day his THS coach, Bill Lane, called him into his office and told him to get ready to receive potential offers. That was never his childhood dream or goal, but he welcomed the opportunity with open arms. As he readied for the road ahead, he continued to pour his heart into getting stronger and becoming an even better player.

Hook 'em Horns Football

Griffin's work in the weight room and on the field paid off, and in his junior year, he was invited to attend the University of Texas' spring game. During the picnic following the game, he was asked to meet with coach Mack Brown in his office. Griffin was offered a scholarship to play for the Horns. Brown told him to go home and talk through the decision with his

parents, but Griffin didn't need the time to discern. "I told him, 'Coach, I don't need to think about this. I want to play for your team.'"

With that commitment, he became a part of the Longhorn family, something he treasures even now. Year after year, Griffin pushed and pounded his way onto the field, overcoming injuries and dominating athletes bigger and faster than him. In 2007 during his senior year, he earned the title of team captain.

It wasn't just his role on the football field that made Griffin such a star student-athlete. That same drive carried over to the classroom, where he notched six semesters of perfect 4.0s, graduating with a combined grade point average of 3.88. As a fifth-year senior studying for his MBA under the prestigious Red McCombs program, Griffin was awarded the Draddy Trophy, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) academic equivalent to the Heisman.

Even more than five years later, he remains a standout in Brown's mind. "Dallas Griffin represents every coach's dream in a student-athlete," shares Brown. "He was committed to excellence in everything that he did. He has tremendous character and was a fine player and a great student. Any coach would take a million Dallas Griffins."

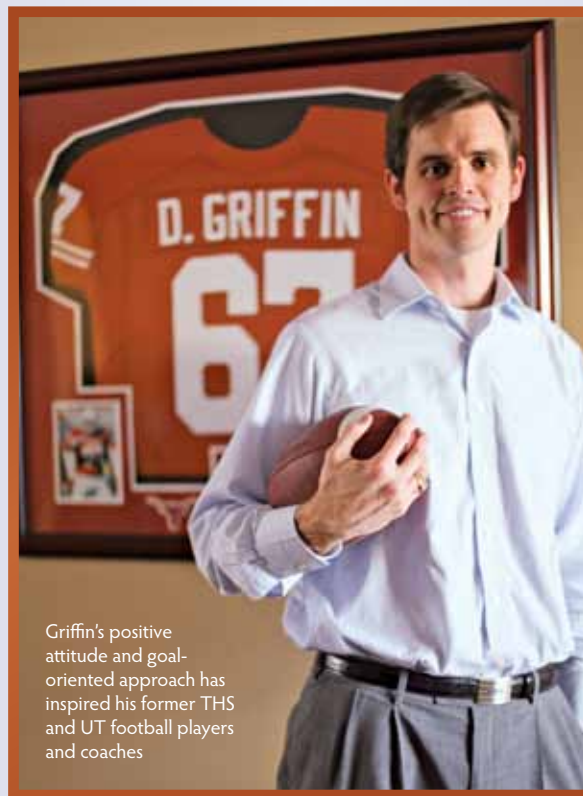
Not Part of the Plan

In 2009, Griffin graduated with his MBA from UT, moved back to the Katy area, and began a career as an investment banker for Simmons and Company. Life seemed to be moving along just as he had planned. He even found time in his 80- to 90-hour work weeks

to train for triathlons, keep up his athletic drive, and have a relationship with his now fiancé, Lauren.

It was during the triathlon training that he first started cycling seriously. And it was during a routine ride that he first noticed a strange tingling feeling in his feet. "I thought it was my shoes," he says. "So I bought new shoes."

A month later, he was walking down the hallway at his office and had to stop and catch himself on a wall when his calves and hamstrings went virtually numb. Griffin drove himself straight to the emergency room, where Lauren was an ER doctor, trying to call her on the way. As cell service goes, she wouldn't find out he was there until she saw his name on the board. "Yeah, she wasn't really excited about that," he says sheepishly. "Not exactly how you want to find out about your boyfriend in the hospital."



Griffin's positive attitude and goal-oriented approach has inspired his former THS and UT football players and coaches

Learning the Diagnosis

After an MRI and a painful spinal tap, Griffin was told he was one of the roughly 400,000 Americans with MS, a disease that attacks the central nervous system and whose symptoms range from mild (numbness) to severe (paralysis). The first 48 hours was the toughest, according to Griffin. "Unfortunately, all the hospitals have Wi-Fi, so I spent hours reading on the internet about all of these terrible cases," he recalls. "I didn't know what that meant for me."

After the initial shock and a visit from an extended family member with MS, Griffin's innate resolve and perseverance kicked in. He pledged to fight: fight to keep his symptoms at bay through healthy eating, medicine, and exercise and fight to raise money for the cause.

Cycling for a Cure

Soon after his diagnosis, Griffin purchased a new bike and started training to ride in the BP MS 150, a two-day cycling event from Houston to Austin and one of the largest fundraisers for the National MS Society. In support of his endeavor, many coworkers, friends, and family members decided to ride alongside him this past April. On race day, about 50 riders showed up for the Simmons and Co. team, all wearing special jerseys emblazoned with "To Austin for Dallas."

Griffin is more proud and humbled that their team raised about \$100,000 this year, important dollars that will go straight to research and finding a cure for MS. If you ask

Griffin if he will ride next year, he only plans to if they haven't found a cure by then. That's the optimism that defines him. His ultimate goal is to put the National MS Society out of business, and he will ride every year until that becomes a reality.

"Before I was diagnosed, I really thought I was in control of my life," he says. "But now, I know I've never really been in control and I can't control this. To have the courage to know that's okay. That lesson has been an incredible blessing." Without a doubt, Griffin's strong mind and body will carry him far in his new goal of defeating MS. **KM**



MEAGAN CLANAHAAN lives in Katy with her husband and twin toddlers. She believes there is nothing better than fall and football.

“Before I was diagnosed, I really thought I was in control of my life. But now, I know I’ve never really been in control and I can’t control this. To have the courage to know that’s okay. That lesson has been an incredible blessing.”

– Dallas Griffin

Uncompromised Care

Providing caring, state-of-the-art diagnosis and treatment for these and many other rheumatology

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Gout
- Vasculitis
- Lupus
- Osteoarthritis
- Psoriasis
- Psoriatic arthritis
- Ankylosis Spondylitis
- Wegner's
- Raynaud's
- ...and many more

We offer ultrasound guided joint injections, in-office infusion therapy, extremities Open MRI, and clinical trials



Houston Rheumatology Center

Sabeen Najam, MD, PA
Board Certified in Rheumatology



Most major insurances & Medicare accepted

©2012 Katy Magazine

Now open in Katy!

609A Park Grove Dr. | Katy, TX 77450 | 281-851-7088 | www.houstonrheumatology.net