

Cheering Through Challenges

OHS freshman finds strength and faith amid alopecia journey

By Adair Bledsoe
staff writer

OHS freshman Keaton Chamblee was diagnosed with alopecia, a condition that causes sudden hair loss, in the middle of her eighth-grade year. What started as a personal challenge quickly became a story of support and strengthened faith.

Last month, during Alopecia Awareness Month, her cheer team and coaches recognized her in front of the home football game crowd, highlighting how community can make a difference when someone faces adversity.

"I was mentally not okay," K. Chamblee said. "I couldn't picture the fact that I wouldn't have hair."

K. Chamblee's mother, Beth Chamblee, was familiar with alopecia, but the severity of her daughter's diagnosis was more intense than expected.

"Once all of her hair started falling out, I felt helpless, paralyzed and terribly sad," B. Chamblee said. "I didn't anticipate it being as extreme as it was."

K. Chamblee has learned that it is okay to be unique and embrace your differences.

"Most people aren't different in their looks, but you just can't be scared of what other people think," K. Chamblee said. "You have to be confident in who God made you to be"

K. Chamblee is a member of the

OHS cheer team. Her relationships with her teammates and coaches during the school year have been extremely beneficial for her because of how supportive everyone has been. Head Coach Amelie Goss has continued to empower K. Chamblee throughout her journey.

"I try to be there for my athletes in all they are experiencing, whether it's supporting them in other extracurricular activities, showing up for celebrations or doing my best to lift them up during unexpected trials," Goss said. "I know Keaton's other cheer coaches and teammates feel the same. This is why our team feels like a family."

Sophomore teammate Anne Margaret Wilkinson noticed that it was Alopecia Awareness Month and brought the news to the coaches. With this announcement, the team knew they wanted to spread awareness for the autoimmune condition.

"She wanted to know if we could do something special for Keaton at an upcoming practice," Goss said. "We loved the idea but wanted to give her recognition in an area where her story could be shared with others. Keaton has a story to tell and is truly a light to all that know her."

At a home game against Tupelo High School, the cheer team honored K. Chamblee before the game, awarding her with flowers and a standing ovation from the crowd.

"Some of us were in tears, some

were cheering loudly and all of us were smiling," Goss said. "Anne Margaret presented her with flowers and Keaton's freshman teammates standing near her ran up and hugged her at the end. It was a sweet moment. I hope she knows how proud we are of her."

K. Chamblee not only has the support from her cheer team, but her family and friends as well. With their support she has been able to move through her journey with love.

"The love and support from the school has been incredible," B. Chamblee said. "Even starting at the middle school when Keaton was missing school and we were in all the doctors appointments, the teachers and staff were amazing."

Keaton's diagnosis has been a challenge for her family, but they have grown stronger and closer because of it.

"I think we have all seen a supernatural strength in Keaton that we know could only come from God," B. Chamblee said.

"We are so thankful for it, and it's given us all in -

credible strength and changed things in life."

For K. Chamblee, faith serves as an anchor through hardship. Her message is a reminder that faith can bring people together through uncertainty.

"God gives his hardest battles to his strongest soldiers," K. Chamblee said. "Everybody's going to have a different way of getting through it in a different story. In the end, everybody is equal, and it really doesn't matter how you look because everyone is the same in Jesus's eyes."



Photos Courtesy of Amelie Goss



Left: OHS Cheer poses for a photo at a home football game. The team took this picture after honoring freshman Keaton Chamblee.

Right: Sophomore teammate Anne Margaret Wilkinson and freshman Keaton Chamblee smile for a picture. Wilkinson presented Chamblee with flowers.

