

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

In this week's blog we take an inside look at former Ohio State University quarterback and current Chicago Bears QB Justin Fields' journey with epilepsy. The 23-year-old Chicago Bears quarterback, who was 15 at the time, was diagnosed with epilepsy, which is the fourth-most common neurological disorder in the world, according to the Epilepsy Foundation. When Justin was diagnosed with epilepsy he began crying. He didn't know how epilepsy would affect his football career.

As it turned out, it hasn't affected his football career at all. In just his second season with the Chicago Bears, Justin is emerging as one of the most prolific rushing quarterbacks in the NFL. After a tough rookie season, Fields is beginning to live up to his hype.

Justin understands the warning signs to the preventative measures he takes every day to the potential of outgrowing his epilepsy. There was a time he said he wasn't comfortable talking about epilepsy, but now he wants to help raise awareness and be a role model for others.

Justin Fields was in the ninth grade when he had his first seizure and was diagnosed with epilepsy, and his first fear was for his football career. But Fields has managed his condition well enough to star in college and flash his potential with the Bears.

After a round of testing, including a CT scan and electroencephalogram, where electrodes were placed onto Fields' scalp to record the electrical activity of his brain, doctors determined he had epilepsy. The doctors drew a hereditary connection upon learning Fields' mother, Gina Tobey, also had epilepsy. Tobey was diagnosed in the seventh grade, and she said she outgrew the condition around the age of 19.

Justin's mother said doctors believe puberty triggered the onset of her epilepsy, and she believes that might have been the same situation for Fields. Puberty can trigger epilepsy due to the impact hormones can have on a person's seizure threshold.

Ms. Tobey pointed out warning signs of an oncoming seizure. The most important advice she gave Justin was to remain diligent about taking his medication. He takes four pills every morning to prevent seizures. He said the seizures have occurred about a year and a half apart, and he estimates his last one was a couple of years ago, before the NFL draft. Justin does say that when he did have a seizure, it was just because he didn't take his anti-seizure medication.

Justin's mother saw a difference in her son's experience than hers. She noticed that Justin's recovery time was different than hers. Ms. Tobey. At the end of his seizures, Justin would suffer from monster migraine headaches. For her, she would take one or two days to recover. For Justin, it takes him two to three hours, he can sleep it off."

Justin can sense when he is about to have a seizure. He forgets what he is doing, zones out and then boom, 30 seconds later he would be locked in. This will happen about two or three times. At that point he realizes that a seizure is coming. To keep himself safe, Justin will immediately lay down and try to rest. He knows that when he wakes up and his head is hurting, Justin knows that he has had a seizure in his sleep.

It is possible Fields outgrows his seizures, but for the time being, Justin's mother isn't taking any chances. Even at age twenty-three, Justin's mother will ask if he is still taking his anti-seizure medication. She said, "that's just what mothers do."

The 23-year-old Fields said he's reached a point in his life where he's comfortable talking about his condition, and he plans to raise awareness about epilepsy. Fields has never missed a game from college to the NFL. Doctors usually advise caution when it comes to playing contact sports with epilepsy, but there are no absolutes that rule out someone's ability to play football. Justin's doctors said the key is to make sure the condition is being properly controlled. If the epilepsy isn't properly controlled, then there is the possibility that somebody may have an altered awareness intermittently, and if you were playing a sport where that could put you in danger in and of itself, then that would be an issue that would have to be seriously discussed.

Fields said he doesn't remember having specific conversations about his epilepsy during any of his NFL pre-draft visits with teams. His agent, David Mulugheta of Athletes First, prepared him for any possible questions.

When Fields' epilepsy became public before the draft, Ohio State coach Ryan Day took to Twitter to support his quarterback, who was the first one in OSU history to lead the Buckeyes to back-to-back playoffs. Fields finished third in the Heisman voting as a sophomore.

Ryan Day stated, "Justin's health, toughness and work ethic have never been an issue, and I am incredibly proud of his professionalism and the character he displays on and off the field. The fact that he never missed a game at Ohio State speaks volumes about how he takes care of himself."

Fields isn't the first person with epilepsy to play in the NFL. Former Pittsburgh Steelers guard Alan Faneca discussed his experience with epilepsy during his Hall of Fame induction speech in August 2021. "If I did it, so can Justin Fields, and so can anyone else," Faneca tweeted after news broke of Fields' epilepsy. "It is part of us but does not define us!"

Justin Fields has been praised for sharing his journey and using his platform to help raise awareness. Just like Alan Faneca, Justin is focused on breaking stigmas and inspiring others, especially children with epilepsy. "It's just that, bringing more awareness and then also giving those kids hope," Fields said.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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