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## **Become My Hero Helps Yale Grad Go for the Gold**

### ***Future Olympian Seun Abediyi Travels to Nigeria to Find a Cure for His Cancer***

**New Haven**—His cancer in remission, Seun Abediyi stopped for one more dose of chemotherapy at Memorial Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City before boarding a plane to Nigeria Wednesday. His trip has two purposes: to celebrate his brother's marriage and to find someone to help cure his cancer.

This past June, Seun had it all. At 26-years-old, he'd just graduated from Yale Law School and accepted a job at Goldman Sachs. He'd just signed with one of the top coaches in the Olympic Skeleton sledding sport for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Socchi, Russia. Seun would represent Nigeria as the first competitor the country ever sends to the Olympics.

A few days later, he blinked and everything changed. A visit to Yale Health Services to have a swollen gland checked out sent his world spinning. Seun has leukemia and lymphoma and he spent his summer and early fall fighting the disease (and attending Bikram Yoga classes, flying small planes and training for the Olympics).

His only chance for survival is to have a stem cell transplant within the next six weeks. He is organizing bone marrow drives in the U.S. However, it is unlikely that a bone marrow donor would be of the best benefit to him, since the pool of potential donors that will match his genetics is very small in the U.S.

New Haven-based Become My Hero, on the other hand, plans to use his fairly identifiable genetic heritage to find a donor among the hundreds of thousands of Nigerians that have the same Yoruba heritage that Seun has.

“In a cord blood transplant, umbilical cord blood – which is rich in marrow-generating stem cells – is engrafted into the patient. Because the T-cells in umbilical blood are relatively naive, they are less likely to attack my organs in Graft Vs. Host Disease, or GVHD, than the T-cells from a mismatched adult donor,” Seun explains.

While in Nigeria, Seun is focusing on finding donors that are of his same ethnic group and tribe. He traveled with 350 HLA typing kits that his fellow Nigerians can use to help identify if they're a good match for Seun.

“We believe that this offers Seun a great opportunity to find several perfectly matched donors. And who knows, maybe we'll get so lucky that he finds a donor during the first try,” says Dr. Ted Collins, founder of Become My Hero. The organization mission was recently refocused to help individuals in need of a stem cell transplant find their safest match.

Collins lost his daughter Natasha, a Yale Medical School student of mixed race, in August to GVHD after a bone marrow transplant that did not closely enough match her genetic makeup.

Seun faces the sad fact that many minorities face: a good match for a bone marrow transplant only happens 17 percent of the time.

“There’s a significant underrepresentation,” Adebisi says. “African Americans comprise eight percent of the national bone marrow registry. Most of them—including me—have no idea such an urgent need exists. I think it’s tragic that this lack of awareness prevents so many complications in finding a match in a life-saving transplant.”

In June, Seun started what he thought would be a tale of his road to the Olympics at <http://nigeria2014.wordpress.com/>. The blog has developed into a story of his battle with cancer.

“I’m scared when I consider the possibility of dying young and not having the chance to fulfill many of my dreams—competing in the Olympics and having children and grandchildren,” he says candidly.

He reroutes the fear. He stays strong and centered.

“Life goes on,” says Seun. “The best way to capture the essence of life is to lose one’s self in service of others. My passion has been centered more and more on the way my story can affect the lives of others. I hope that the awareness I’m building, if not me, someone will find a life-saving transplant.”

In the meantime, Seun has not lost his Olympic dream. “I won’t be as competitive as I could have been if I’d continued training without interruption, but I am going to give it my best,” says Seun.

“I’ve gotten so much more out of this than I’ve lost and it may turn out to be one of the greatest blessings of my life to go through an experience like this and realize how precious life is and how important it is to stay connected to the present,” he says.

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***Become My Hero is a New Haven-based organization founded by Dr. Ted Collins, CSO of Natasha's Place - the National Mixed Heritage and Minority Cord Blood Bank and Registry.***

*For more information, please visit [www.becomemyhero.org](http://www.becomemyhero.org) or visit us on Facebook.*

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