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Vasculitis Foundation Announces Partnership With Olympic Hopeful and Vasculitis Patient Brandon Hudgins to Create Awareness of Autoimmune Vasculitis

Public invited to join "Victory Over Vasculitis: VF Team Brandon" and run or walk toward collective 100,000-mile goal

(Kansas City, MO): The Vasculitis Foundation (VF) is pleased to announce that it has partnered with Olympic hopeful and vasculitis patient Brandon Hudgins to create Victory Over Vasculitis: VF Team Brandon." The initiative is designed to support Hudgins' efforts to increase awareness of his rare, autoimmune disease as he attempts to qualify for the United States Olympic Team.

"The Vasculitis Foundation is both humbled and thrilled to be associated with Brandon," said Joyce A. Kullman, executive director of the Vasculitis Foundation, which is committed to improving the lives of current and future patients and serves as the definitive resource for those seeking information about vasculitis. "Through his ongoing, intense athletic training and boundless energy as an advocate for vasculitis awareness, he exemplifies our philosophy that patients with autoimmune diseases can live rich, full lives."

She adds that, "Since 1986, the Vasculitis Foundation has empowered patients through disease education, raising awareness of vasculitis in the general public and medical community, and funding research to determine the cause, develop more effective treatments, and discover a cure."

Hudgins, 28, is an elite runner who began competing at age 10 in his native Rock Hill, S.C. He went on to earn a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education: Fitness and Wellness from Winthrop University and a Master's in Exercise Science: Strength and Conditioning from Appalachian State University.

On August 7, 2015, he became only the 448th American to run a mile in less than 4-minutes when he completed the Sir Walter Miler in Raleigh, N.C. in 3:59.67. Following this achievement, *Runner's World* said he was "most likely the first to do so after overcoming granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), a rare autoimmune disease that affects the blood vessels," adding that his "fifth-place finish . . . marked the culmination of a journey that has included three bouts with the disease, which is treated with chemotherapy and high doses of corticosteroids, in eight years."

This year, Hudgins is training to qualify for the 2016 Olympic Trials in Eugene, OR. Goal-focused and tenacious despite his physical challenges, Hudgins told *Runner's World*, "If you want something badly enough and have the courage to chase your dreams, you have to be willing to walk through the dark places to get them."

His illness was diagnosed in 2008 following a seven-month struggle with severe sinus symptoms. Since then he has suffered two relapses as well as anxiety and depression, but has been symptom-free since 2013.

Vasculitis Foundation Establishes "Team Brandon"

Today, Hudgins is a passionate advocate for vasculitis awareness. He formed the partnership with the VF this year because he wants to help raise awareness among the medical community and the public about the needs and challenges facing all patients with autoimmune vasculitis. This new campaign is called "Victory Over Vasculitis: VF Team Brandon." Through this effort, Brandon is leveraging his public profile to create awareness of autoimmune diseases.

As part of the campaign, Hudgins invites the public to become involved in VF Team Brandon's Virtual 100K challenge. In addition to supporting his Olympic training, the team has set a goal to collectively run or walk 100,000 miles by the end of 2016. To date, more than 320 people from around the world have joined the team. Each member is asked to log his or her weekly miles, which are counted toward the grand goal. There is no cost for participating. More information is available at www.vasculitisfoundation.org.

Hudgins' Final Laps Before the Olympics

Hudgins continues to train and compete as he moves toward the Olympic Trials, which begin in July.

"The Olympic Trials qualifying standard in the 1500-meter run is 3:38," he says. "If I run that time, it guarantees my entry. They will take 30 people to the trials. If more than 30 run the standard, they will take everyone who has run the standard. If fewer than 30 run the standard then they will follow a descending order list of times above 3:38 to fill the field size at 30. Last year I ran 3:42 for 1500 m but my mile time converts to 3:41.6. I know it sounds a bit confusing but the international distance is the 1500 and not the mile."

Earlier this year, Hudgins won first place (1:53) in the 800-meter George Mason Run at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. In April, at the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut, CA, he placed seventh with a time of 3:44 in the 1500-meter race, which he attributes to his own tactical errors. "I had to make up too much ground the last 400 meters of the race," he says. In the Penn Relays, a very tactical race held in Philadelphia, PA at the end of April that Hudgins says mimics the Olympic Trials, he finished second by running a mile in 4:02.5. "I closed hard," he says, but just wound up short of the victory," And in the USA Track and Field (USATF) 1 Mile Road Championships, which were held on a hilly and windy course in Minneapolis, MN, he finished in fifth place with a time of 4:02, up from his eighth-place finish last year against a weaker field, and his first top-five finish at a USATF event.

His next three events will be 1,500-meter races that will give him the opportunity to meet the

qualifying standard. They are the Furman Elite in Greenville, NC on June 4, the Portland Track Festival on June 12 and the Portland Summer Twilight on June 18, both in Oregon.

Over the next few months, he will also compete in the USATF Olympic Team Trials in Eugene, OR (July 1–10), the Sir Walter Miler in Raleigh, NC (August 5), the West Chester Road Mile in West Chester, PA (August 11), the Liberty Mile in Pittsburgh, PA (August 26), and Grandma's Minnesota Mile in Duluth, MN (September 11).

"To give you an idea of my current status," Hudgins says, "people that I have beat or just narrowly lost to in the last month have all run between 3:36 and 3:39. So it's very comforting to know that I'm right in the realm, I just have to go out and do it now!"

About the Vasculitis Foundation

Since 1986, the Vasculitis Foundation has empowered patients through disease education, raising awareness of vasculitis in the general public and medical community, and funding research to determine the cause, develop more effective treatments, and discover a cure. The VF is committed to improving the lives of current and future patients and is positioned as the definitive resource for patients, family members, medical professionals and researchers seeking information about vasculitis.

For more information about **Victory over Vasculitis: VF Team Brandon** please visit:
http://www.vasculitisfoundation.org/victory-over-vasculitis_2/

For information about vasculitis and the Vasculitis Foundation please visit
www.vasculitisfoundation.org.

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