

Athlete to Physician

The Story of Eli Jones

Raised on a farm in Columbia, Tennessee, Eli Jones learned hard lessons at an early age. By the time he turned 10, he knew the rigors of keeping a working farm productive. He had also discovered how it felt to lose his mother, a vibrant, athletic school teacher who died four months after learning that her flulike symptoms were signs of aggressive leukemia.

Jones, a versatile athlete, was a member of the basketball, football, baseball, and track teams, and he was valedictorian of his 1997 Salem High School class. He received numerous scholarship offers from universities and colleges all over the country. But tradition ruled his heart. His parents had graduated from UT, and he was determined to follow in their footsteps. After a satisfying



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look at the biochemistry department and encouragement from football coach Phillip Fulmer, he became a full-fledged Volunteer.

"I was a red-shirt freshman that first year, which meant I didn't dress out for the games—but I practiced every practice," says Jones, smacking his fist into his hand. "I was on the squad that played against the first string. Boy, did I take some hits!"

By the end of the 2001 season, he'd earned a letter, received his second Academic All-SEC honor, and graduated magna cum laude in cellular and molecular biology. Then he embarked on what he calls "the hardest job of my life." He entered medical school at the University of Tennessee, Memphis.

"The studying was relentless," he says. "I went to class from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon, then studied until eleven at night. Finally reality set in. I had always been at the top of my class. At med school, I was struggling just to be in the middle. A lot of brilliant people go to medical school. They're the best of the best."

Jones, now a fourth-year medical student, did his third-year clerkships in pediatrics, neurology, and psychiatry in Memphis. After that he moved to Knoxville to tackle rotations in internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery, and family practice at the UT Graduate School of Medicine. He's also completing electives and weighing the question of which medical specialty to choose. "I'm very interested in anesthesiology," he says. "I've always wanted to use my hands to help people, and I've always tried to show people compassion. As an anesthesiologist, I can do both."

Jones leans forward, extending his open palms. "To be able to use my knowledge and hands to heal others is the ultimate job on the planet."

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