



FORD SUTTER ADMITS HE NEVER forgets about the reality of a once-life-threatening condition, because it is reaffirmed by the faint hitch in his walk and the irritation of where prosthetic leg meets amputated leg. His sense of humor as strong as ever, the 20-something financial advisor jokes, “Flat ground is my best friend.” His laughter is chased by solace in knowing that while the road ahead will never be smooth and easy, at least he still gets to travel it.

Americans annually. Roughly half of those diagnosed don’t survive.

Intense treatment occurred for the next year, which included limb salvage surgery. Afterward, though, Sutter developed a staph infection in his right leg.

On Oct. 1, 2003, Sutter became an above-the-knee amputee.

“It was emotionally stressful, because everyone thinks they’re Superman at that time,” Sutter says. “It was interesting to see my friends’ reaction and my family’s

breaking in a newly bought baseball glove — working it in, using mitt oil to soften the firm leather. Every evening, Sutter massaged the area where socket and skin connect to cope with the natural friction. He still employs the practice. Maintenance is now a way of life.

Something small like gaining three to five pounds, or consuming too much sodium can create complications. The socket on his prosthesis usually needs replacement every year, and the robotic

STEP-BY-STEP

A post-operation infection from pediatric bone cancer cost New Orleanian Ford Sutter his right leg, but it hasn’t prevented him from moving on

BY WILLIAM KALEC | PORTRAIT BY ROMERO & ROMERO

In 2002, Sutter was an 8th-grade boy like any other when he was diagnosed with pediatric bone cancer in his right leg. The problem first surfaced during a soccer tournament in Hammond. Sutter felt a “pop” in his knee, but continued to play through the discomfort. Two weeks later, the pain intensified. Six months after that, Sutter couldn’t walk.

Originally believed to be a lateral meniscus tear, Sutter went to see a specialist at Children’s Hospital in New Orleans. After a series of tests — biopsy, CT scan, bone scan — doctors told Sutter they found osteosarcoma (bone cancer), a rare condition that afflicts approximately 3,000

reactions, because I was always the one doing sports and always on-the-go, and then to have that happen really altered not only my life, but also a lot of who I was at the time — so you’re not quite sure how to deal with that.

“I had a really tough time, just because I was doing what it took to survive. I just took things one chemo at a time. But yes, it was a lot of loss because I was always an able-bodied kid.”

Within a week post-amputation, Sutter was standing on his prosthetic leg and bearing weight, fighting through the pain of fresh stitches and sutures. The process of adapting to this new reality he equates to

knee and foot every three years. Currently, the knee outfitted for Sutter (the high-tech Rheo Knee 3, made by Ossur) features a microprocessor control that learns his natural gait pattern, thus providing optimal stability and safety on various terrains and surfaces.

“Most of my friends who know me, don’t even recognize me as an amputee now,” Sutter says. “And since this all happened, that was a goal to be viewed as an equal. I still have my tough days but if you put your mind to it, you can get through it. Yes, I have to get around the world differently than most people, but you can get through it.”