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Contact: Randall Hawkins, rhawkins@chrisdraft.org

Team Draft Sends Super Bowl Challenge Winners to Super Bowl, Pro-Bowl and Taste of the NFL to Raise Lung Cancer Awareness

Phoenix, AZ. The winners of the inaugural Super Bowl Challenge will enjoy trips to the Super Bowl, the NFL Pro-Bowl and the Taste of the NFL this month as part of Team Draft’s National Campaign to Change the Face of Lung  Cancer . The winners are all lung cancer survivors with powerful stories to share about their often misunderstood disease. Team Draft was founded by NFL veteran Linebacker Chris Draft and his late wife Keasha, an engineer and Clemson graduate who died of lung cancer at the age of 38.

 “We are proud to honor these outstanding advocates who are truly changing the face of lung cancer by supporting promising research and treatments that are giving lung cancer survivors more days weeks , months and even years to treasure with their loved ones,” Chris Draft. Lung cancer survivors across the United States joined the Super Bowl Challenge by raising funds in support of Team Draft’s National Campaign to Change the Face of Lung Cancer—which is dedicated to raising public awareness about the true nature of the disease and shattering misconceptions about lung cancer which is often mischaracterized as a “smoker’s disease”. Challenge participants were part of a friendly competition, with the top fundraisers awarded trips to the Super Bowl, the NFL Pro-Bowl and the Taste of the NFL.

The winner of the Super Bowl Challenge, Paul Kalanithi and his wife Lucy will attend the Taste of the NFL on January 31, 2015 and Super Bowl XLIX (49) on February 1, 2015 at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

“We were thrilled to raise funds for Team Draft! My husband Paul was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer as a 36-year-old, and Team Draft has really helped boost our family's spirits during this challenging time,” said Lucy Kalanithi. “Team Draft raises awareness of lung cancer and empowers survivors in such a positive way. We've also had tremendous support from our friends and family, who really stepped up to contribute to the Super Bowl Challenge. Paul is a huge football fan, and we can't wait to join Team Draft at Super Bowl XLIX!”

 Paul Kalanithi was a Resident in Neurosurgery at Stanford University when he was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer in June 2013.  A graduate of Stanford University, he had also attended Cambridge and graduated from medical school at Yale before returning to Stanford to complete his residency and neurosurgical training. Dr.  Kalanithi chronicled his lung cancer journey in an op-ed piece in the New York Times in January, 2014. In addition to continuing his medical practice, Dr. Kalanithi has become a tireless advocate for lung cancer awareness and research.

Lung Cancer Survivor and Super Bowl Challenge Runner-up Dan Powell of Greenville, South Carolina attended the NFL Pro Bowl on Sunday, January 25, 2015.  "Going to the Pro Bowl was a dream come true.  This time last year I was fighting for my life with the stage IV lung cancer diagnosis. We have incredible support from my friends, family, my church, support groups, and cutting-edge treatment from St. Francis Cancer Center.  I've learned through my cancer experience and support from Team Draft ‘anything is possible and to never give up!", said Powell.

Dan Powell was 35 when he was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. A non-smoker, Powell is well aware of the role air quality plays in lung health- he has served as Director of Air Quality for Greenville County, South Carolina.  Powell won the trip to the Pro Bowl in Team Draft’s Super Bowl Challenge--a friendly competition between lung cancer survivors to raise funds and awareness for lung cancer research and treatment.  Dan’s guest at the Pro Bowl was his friend Rick Owens who was diagnosed with lung cancer in October of last year. Rick shares another bond with the Team Draft lung cancer awareness project unfolding in Arizona--he works for Clemson University, the alma mater of both Keasha Draft and Levon Kirkland.

Kirkland, an All-Pro linebacker who spent ten seasons in the NFL playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Seattle Seahawks, and Philadelphia Eagles, joined Chris Draft and Team Draft in hosting lung cancer survivors Dan Powell and Rick Owens at the Pro Bowl.

Draft and Kirkland have much more than their NFL careers in common. They both married dynamic, outgoing women named Keasha who lost their lives to lung cancer at an early age. Neither Keasha Draft nor Keisha Kirkland smoked, and like thousands of other lung cancer survivors, they were stunned by their diagnoses.  Before they passed away, both women dedicated themselves to changing the face of lung cancer and educating people about the true nature of the disease--a disease that is too often mischaracterized as a “smoker’s disease”.  Their legacies live, with their husbands continuing their fight.

Super Bowl Challenge second Runner-Up and lung cancer survivor **S**amantha Mixon of St. Simons Island, Georgia is heading to the Taste of the NFL, a gala event taking place in the Super Bowl city the night before the big game.**"**We are super excited to be able to go to the Taste of NFL thanks to Team Draft and all of our amazing friends, family, and even strangers that supported us.  God is so good, we are beyond blessed!” said Samantha. Guests at the Taste of the NFL will enjoy dishes prepared by some of the best chefs in the country on the night before the Super Bowl, and they’ll meet legendary players from all 32 NFL teams. The event raises money for food banks around the country. For Samantha Mixon, it also offers an opportunity to share the story of her journey with lung cancer, and plans to share details and photos of the occasion on her blog.

 Samantha Mixon was 33 when she was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer two years ago. The mother of a young daughter, she pressed her doctor for a prognosis, and was given one year, perhaps eighteen months to live. Looking back, she says she regrets asking for that time line, and since getting the diagnosis, she has profoundly changed her way of approaching each and every day.  “After almost a year I quit asking "why me?" and became grateful that I know. I know I may not have much time left on this earth. Knowing that is a gift in itself. You see, I could get into an accident tomorrow and not survive. But that didn't happen. I was given a warning, not the ticket.”  Samantha grew up in Jonesboro, Georgia and though she now resides on St. Simons Island, she frequently visits her mother in Atlanta and in addition to lung cancer advocacy work she does with her blog she has worked with the Free to Breathe Atlanta Lung Cancer Run.

 “Super Bowl week is a fitting time to spotlight the crusade to change the face of lung cancer. The level of commitment, drive and passion required to make it this far parallels the efforts required to get lung cancer research to the next level,” said Chris Draft who co-founded Team Draft with his late wife Keasha to change the face of lung cancer.

Keasha and Chris Draft  had attended the Super Bowl the year of her diagnosis, fulfilling one of her lifelong dreams. The memory of that Super Bowl trip served as part of the inspiration for The Super Bowl Challenge. “It takes a team to tackle lung cancer, and the Super Bowl Challenge has expanded this amazing team. Keasha’s legacy of hope lives on through the Super Bowl Challenge team and we are grateful to all who have contributed and continue to contribute to lung cancer awareness, research, treatment and patient advocacy efforts, and “said Draft.  “We are excited to have the opportunity to take the Super Bowl Challenge winners and their stories to the Super Bowl the Pro-Bowl and the Taste of the NFL.”

The Chris Draft Family Foundation would like to thank the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Company and their Lilly Oncology team for sponsoring the Team Draft initiative to change the face of lung cancer.

About Team Draft

Team Draft, an initiative of the Chris Draft Family Foundation, is dedicated to raising lung cancer awareness and increasing badly needed research funding by shattering the misconception that lung cancer is a “smoker’s disease.” Despite the fact that between 20,000 and 30,000 people who have never smoked are diagnosed with lung cancer in the United States each year, the smoking stigma negatively impacts lung cancer research funding, which pales in comparison to funding for other major cancers and diseases. Team Draft is committed to educating people about the true nature of lung cancer, raising funds for research and improving the lives of those affected by lung cancer. To learn more about Team Draft, share your story, or make a donation, please visit [http://www.teamdraft.org](http://www.prweb.net/Redirect.aspx?id=aHR0cDovL3d3dy50ZWFtZHJhZnQub3Jn" \t "_blank).

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