

# Jerry Cahill inspires people with cystic fibrosis to reach their goals



*“You have to be relentless to achieve your goals.”*

**JERRY CAHILL**  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, BEF

become the name of one of his projects, a website and merchandise line that encourages others to be the hero of their own story. Proceeds from the campaign fund a college scholarship for exceptional student-athletes with CF.

“Everyone faces obstacles in life,” he said. “But you have to be positive and work hard and be passionate about life, and work to find the hero within.”

If anyone is all in for cystic fibrosis (CF), it's Jerry Cahill. He is the man behind Team Boomer, the arm of the Boomer Esiason Foundation that encourages exercise; runs a CF podcast; and has created a CF super hero called Big Air Jerry to inspire children with CF to overcome their personal challenges. On top of this, he was the subject of a documentary about his experiences living with CF, before and after his lung transplant.

And yet, for most of his life, Jerry, a life-long athlete and pole vaulting coach who is now 60 years old, told almost no one that he had CF.

“I had a demanding career, and I traveled with my medications. I became a Vice President at my company. But the people I worked with didn't know I had CF, until I reached the point where I could no longer work,” he said.

That was twelve years ago.

His health in decline, he left his career in sales and marketing within the apparel industry. Never one to give up, he decided to reinvent himself, and began volunteering with the Boomer Esiason Foundation, a CF organization dedicated to heightening awareness, education and quality of life for those affected by CF.

Gradually, he began to share his story, and became more and more active in the CF community.

After the shock of leaving his career, the Foundation soon became his home and advocating for CF his purpose.

“They believed in me and gave me a new sense of being,” he says. “Having their support enabled me to expand and grow.”

Today, Jerry encourages others, both with and without CF, to live by his motto – “You cannot fail” – which has since

Before it became a campaign, “You Cannot Fail” was a mantra repeated to Jerry by his parents when he was very young to encourage him to stay strong in the face of his illness.

One of six siblings, and the only one with CF, Jerry grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He was diagnosed with CF in 1967, at the age of 11.

“At the time, CF was considered a death sentence,” Jerry recalls. “Today, there are a lot of opportunities for people with CF. But back then, having a regular life and going to college was unheard of.”

Jerry's parents refused to let him stay at home and instead insisted that he maintain an active lifestyle. They worried he wouldn't live very long, but wanted him to spend a lot of time with his brothers, so they signed him up for every sport they participated in – football, baseball, basketball. Jerry struggled to keep up with his brothers, who were older, bigger and stronger than he was.

But in high school, after failing to make the basketball team, he settled on track and field, where he excelled in the pole vault.

“Enrolling me in sports was the single most important thing my parents did for me,” Jerry recalls. “I didn't think of myself as someone who was sick with CF. I thought of myself as an athlete.”

Jerry is still an athlete, and avid cyclist and runner who coaches pole vaulting at several New York area high schools.

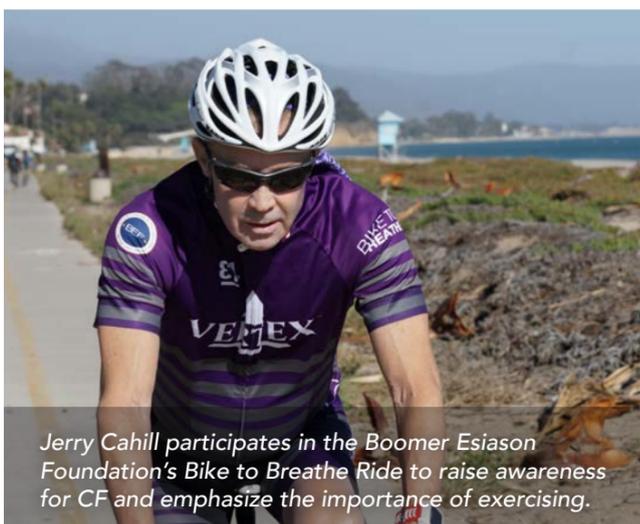
“I think being in sports is extremely important in life. It gives you a sense of wellbeing, and builds very strong discipline. Participating in sports is about training your body, your mind and your spirit,” he said.

Jerry's own determination and work ethic were depicted in the film “Up for Air,” a documentary that follows him through five years of his life, leading up to and following a double lung transplant he received in 2012. In “Up for Air,” the man who kept the story of his CF a secret for so long shares the psychological and emotional challenges of coping with the disease, while also revealing the grit and determination that have powered him through life.

“You have to be relentless to achieve your goals,” he said. “You have to live life to the fullest and nothing should stop you. Not CF, not cancer, not anything.”

Jerry's advocacy activities have made him a hero to many in the CF community, and every day he spends time speaking to people with CF and their families, encouraging them to move live to its fullest and work to reach all of their goals.

“I am so inspired by the CF community,” he said. “We are all working hard to achieve the same goal. Some people are out there speaking and inspiring others, some people are out there working hard to develop new drugs, and some people are out there raising awareness. We're all working toward a common goal, and that's to improve the quality of life for people with CF.”



Jerry Cahill participates in the Boomer Esiason Foundation's Bike to Breathe Ride to raise awareness for CF and emphasize the importance of exercising.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT JERRY CAHILL'S WORK IN THE CF COMMUNITY:

**Team Boomer**  
[www.esiason.org/team-boomer](http://www.esiason.org/team-boomer)

**Up for Air (Documentary)**  
[www.esiason.org/up-for-air](http://www.esiason.org/up-for-air)

**You Cannot Fail**  
[www.youcannotfail.com](http://www.youcannotfail.com)

**Jerry Cahill's Cystic Fibrosis Podcast**  
[www.youcannotfail.com](http://www.youcannotfail.com)

**Jerry Cahill's CF Wind Sprints**  
[www.cfwindsprints.com](http://www.cfwindsprints.com)