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My Next Goal Is For You Tom! Tribute by England & Southampton Player James Beattie to Thomas Whiley.

A SOUTHAMPTON youngster who was told he would never walk has said a Christmas thank you to the Saints star who's inspired him to trek unaided around the team's pitch. Thomas Whiley, 11, suffers from Lowe Syndrome, meaning he is mentally and physically handicapped visually impaired and has brittle bones and failing kidneys.

He was not expected to live past the age of five and the youngster's parents Tracey and Robert, from Greenlea Crescent, Bassett, were told he would never walk. But ever since the little boy was taken to his first football match two years ago, he has yearned to be like his hero James Beattie. So when his dad told him that if he wanted to be like James Beattie he would have to walk the whole way round the football pitch, which is exactly what Thomas - a pupil at Cedar Special School - did.

The Daily Echo then arranged for the youngster to meet his hero and he even had a kick about with Beattie after a training session last month. Tracey, 38, said she and Robert were so thrilled with all the support from the soccer star that they wanted to say thank you. She and Thomas took a Christmas card and a box of chocolates to the ground at Marchwood for the player. Tracey said: "They've done so much for us we just wanted to say thank you."

Inspirational Child enjoys kick about with star Thomas has a ball with hero Beattie.

First published on Monday 10 November 2003 Southampton News Daily Echo by Emma Joseph

SOUTHAMPTON youngster Thomas Whiley was the envy of all his schoolmates when he was invited to meet his football hero James Beattie

The 11-year-old, who suffers from Lowe syndrome, is physically and mentally handicapped, visually impaired and has brittle bones and failing kidneys. His parents were told Thomas, from Greenlea Crescent, Bassett, would not live past the age of five and would never be able to walk. But inspired by Saints star Beattie, who has become his idol since he attended his first match two years ago, Thomas astounded everyone who knew him two weeks ago when he walked the entire way around the St Mary's pitch unaided.



Dad Robert, 49, said the youngster, who is a pupil at Cedar Special School, had walked short distances unaided before, but set off for his 30-minute challenge during half-time after being told that if he wanted to be like James Beattie he would have to walk round the pitch. Thomas and his parents went along to watch the team training and the football fanatic even had a kickabout with his hero. Mum Tracey, 38, said: "He's been telling all his friends that he was going to meet James Beattie and they were all jealous." He's really enjoyed coming down today. It's a dream come true for him and James has definitely lived up to his expectations."

From **Thomas is a walking miracle** by **Emma Joseph**

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He is mentally and physically handicapped, visually impaired and suffers from kidney failure and brittle bones. Doctors said he would not live past the age of five and would never be able to walk. But 11 year old Thomas Whiley has astounded everyone who knows him by walking all the way round Saints football pitch, completely unaided, after being inspired by his hero, James Beattie.

"At his school they showed me a video of him walking and I cried" - Thomas's mum Tracy

WALKING around with a huge grin on his cheeky face, decked out in his beloved Saints shirt, scarf and hat, Thomas Whiley is the picture of happiness. Mention his favourite player, James Beattie, and the 11-year-old immediately breaks into chants of "Same old Beattie, always scoring", clapping his hands and bouncing around with excitement.

But it was not always smiles for the youngster's family, after he was diagnosed with an incredibly rare condition just six weeks after his birth, leaving him mentally and physically handicapped, visually impaired, with brittle bones and failing kidneys. Sufferers of Lowe Syndrome, which only affects boys, face a lifetime of medication, physiotherapy and pain and a life expectancy of just five years.

The condition was spotted when Thomas, from Greenlea Crescent, Bassett, went for a six-week check up with his GP, who immediately sent him to an eye specialist after diagnosing cataracts in each of the youngster's eyes. He had the cataracts removed at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London before becoming just one of 16 boys in the country to be diagnosed with Lowe Syndrome. Thomas and his parents, Tracey, 38, and Robert, 49, soon became regulars at the children's hospital, often going for appointments twice a week.

But the cheerful youngster battled on, managing to get around by wriggling while lying flat on his back, until mum Tracey taught him to shuffle along on his backside. He made huge improvements once he started at Cedar Special School in Nursling, learning to walk with a frame, although he still has to wear a helmet in case he falls and bangs his head.

But it is in the last two years that the youngster has come on in leaps and bounds. Tracey, a learning support assistant at Cantell School, said: "At the school they showed me a video of him walking and I cried." But the walking on his own started two years ago. He likes trains and he can see them from the window. "One day he got up off the settee and just walked over to the window. He'd never done that before and I kept saying to him 'do it again, do it again'." But there was more to come.

Dad Robert, a warehouse operative for Tesco, took Thomas along to a reserve team match at St Mary's at the end of last season. "I like to be out and about, but I didn't know if he'd like it or not," he said. "But he loved all the noise and the atmosphere. He tried to copy them jogging about, he wanted to be like them, but he just fell over. "He's not really supposed to do that anyway, because he could break a bone."

The pair soon became regulars at the ground and are now both season ticket holders. Robert said: "We have to do the same things because if his routine's different he doesn't like it. "So we have to go to the pub and stop at the chip shop, we have to talk to the same stewards and talk to the policeman. "He likes to talk to everybody and know where they're sitting and what they're doing. "Everyone knows him down there - our friend's husband sits at the other end and he said he could hear him shouting and singing sometimes. "There are people at the stadium who say hello to him and we don't even know who they are."

Thomas, who is a huge **James Beattie** fan, has progressed tremendously since he started going along to matches. And his new-found confidence stunned everyone at the ground when he accompanied Robert to a Saints ladies match two weeks ago. "It was half-time and he was going on about James Beattie, saying he wanted to be like him and work for Saints," said Robert. "So we told him if he wanted to be James Beattie he would have to walk round the football pitch on his own. "And off he went. It took him nearly 30 minutes, but he did it, walking right round the edge of the pitch. "I was absolutely choked."

Tracey, who didn't see Thomas's miracle, has been encouraging the youngster to walk by himself ever since and said the achievement has made the world of difference to him. "He's changed a lot," she said. "He's walking more, he can undress himself and he tries to wash his face and he cleans his teeth." He's more confident in

himself now, he'll try to do things for himself and he never used to be able to do that.
"He just keeps on amazing us."

And Saints goal ace James Beattie said: "It's a real honour that someone with so much determination and courage considers me to be one of their inspirations. I am really pleased Tom enjoys watching Southampton and am touched that I have been a motivation for him over recent months. He is a remarkable kid and my next goal is for you Tom. "All the training and determination I do each day at training and on match days is massively reflected in how hard Tom has had to work to achieve what some people said was impossible - a truly inspirational story."