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Where to Find It

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## Jodi Norton: Adversity Doesn't Keep Diver from Soaring

By Amy Callahan

**O**n recognition of her battle to overcome a life-threatening disease and still compete as a champion diver, Jodi Norton, CC'98, will be honored this month by the Center for Sport in Society at Northeastern University. Last spring she received the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference Award of Valor and was welcomed at the White House.



President Bill Clinton greeted Norton at the White House

Sport in Society's Giant Step Award—to be presented on Oct. 28 at a conference in Boston—honors Norton's courage and leadership in overcoming the limitations of Lupus. Beyond her athletic accomplishments, the northern California native has taken control of and researched her own medical care, has addressed medical students about her condition and makes hospital visits to children who have undergone chemotherapy. At the conference, she has been asked to speak on a panel about career transitions for athletes.

But she hopes her story will have an impact on more than just fellow athletes.

"I realized it is a matter of overcoming adversity, and everyone has adversity," she said recently. "It doesn't have

to be a disease, it can be loss of a loved one, or anything."

Lupus is an incurable, non-contagious disease that strikes the auto-immune system and can be deadly. In addition to enduring the chronic pain caused by Lupus, Norton's diving season and school work were interrupted many times by trips to the emergency room with meningitis, pericarditis (inflammation of the sac around the heart) and swelling of tissue around the brain. She also has been battling Lyme's Disease. Yet she continued to practice when she could, faced her condition head-on and came away from the '95-'96 season as a top ten diver in the ECAC. She maintains a 3.7 G.P.A. as a pre-med student majoring in psychology.



**She Can Soar**—Jodi Norton, CC '98, beautifully executes a reverse dive straight.

"Certainly it was inspiring for me to coach her and to witness first-hand all the hurdles she had to overcome," said her coach, Gordon Spencer.

He described her as "intensely driven" and recalled the '95-'96 ECAC diving championship at Brown. Because of her health—including a broken wrist that had hit the board during a practice—Norton missed most competitions that season. Nonetheless, she qualified for the championship. After the first day of the meet, Norton ended up in the emergency room needing intravenous medication for swollen tissue around her brain. Astonishingly, she came back the next day to place 10th.

"Her degree of difficulty was as high as any woman in the event—not just Columbia women, but any woman," Spencer said. "It was pretty amazing." And he added, "But it's not just sports."

She is not diving this season, and instead is at Biosphere 2 in Oracle, Ariz., conducting a health assessment of the facility and doing research on the prevalence of Lupus in specific communities in Arizona.

Norton's intense power—physical and mental—has pushed her forward. She explained that during the '95-'96 season, while she was too ill to compete or practice, she used a technique called "visualization."

"I would visualize everything," she said: climbing to the

board, the explosive dive and even the comments her coach might make. "So when I got up on the board, I was confident. Basically, no one thought I would come back. But it ended up being my last competition at Columbia, and I'm glad I stuck with it."

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