

## Reason to celebrate

Ray Johnston beats odds by surviving coma, cancer

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Ray Johnston, the famous former Mavs summer leaguer, didn't go back to work in February as he'd hoped.

"Didn't realize the chemo would kick my butt," he said.

But the leukemia that nearly killed him has been in remission since June, and he's been out of his two-month coma more than a year.

So he's throwing a party.

The Cotton Bowl Kick-Off Celebration at Gilley's Dallas on New Year's Day is also sponsored by Donnie Nelson, the Mavs' GM, and the Tide in Texas Alumni Chapter. But it's Ray's idea, heart and soul.

Proceeds will benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the Lee Roy Jordan Scholarship Fund.

Maybe you remember Ray's riveting story: A former walk-on point guard at Alabama, he was diagnosed with leukemia only a few weeks after the Mavs' summer season ended.

Doctors didn't give him much of a chance. He slipped into a coma in August and didn't wake up until November.

"When I woke up," he said in January, "I thought it was the next day."

In between, Ray became a focal point of prayers and concerns for Mavericks players, coaches and personnel.

Not to mention his mother and father. One or the other or both spent weeks and months at his side.

The earmarks of Ray's ordeal are few: He takes a pill every night and an IV once a week, and a lack of circulation cost him a couple of toes.

Other than that, you'd never know you were talking to someone all but given up for dead. Twice.


He's thrown himself into the New Year's Day party. An old habit. He was the social chairman of his fraternity in college.

Among the guests he's lined up are Nelson and Jordan and former Alabama and Cowboys safety George Teague.

A special guest will also make an appearance.

But don't look for Ray's mother, Martha.

"She went to Auburn," he said.

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TOM FOX/DMN  
Former Mavericks summer league player Ray Johnston, who's planning a Jan. 1 bash, chats up Michelle Smith (left), wife of Mavericks trainer Casey Smith, and Amy Van Horn, wife of player Keith Van Horn, at the Mavericks-Suns game.

Even blood doesn't always supersede rivalry. Anyway, Martha's back home in Alabama, leaving Dallas only after it was clear that her son could take care of himself.

He's gone back to work part time as a mortgage banker. And he's taking golf more seriously, perhaps to replace the hours once dedicated to basketball.

He used to play golf once a month. And that was enough, apparently. The day before he went into the hospital last summer, he shot 1-over.

"Now I'm probably about a 16-handicap," he said. "It's a long ways back."

But not as far as it once was. Not by a long shot.

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## KICK-OFF PARTY

**What:** Cotton Bowl Kick-Off Celebration, hosted by Donnie Nelson, Ray Johnston and the Tide in Texas Alumni Chapter.

**When:** Sunday, Jan. 1, 6-11 p.m.

**Where:** Gilley's Dallas

**Tickets:** Available through [www.uacottonparty.com](http://www.uacottonparty.com)

**Benefits:** Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the Lee Roy Jordan Scholarship Fund.

## THUMBS UP

For the kids?

As Pat Riley stood to the side, tears welling, Stan Van Gundy explained he was quitting as coach of the Miami Heat to see more of his kids. Even knew the number of days he's been on the road. Bully for Stan. One thought: Could it be Riley simply wanted his job back? Guess we'll know for sure if Stan shows up at the Indian Princess campout.

Movin' on

In the tradition of Oklahoma coordinators Mike Leach, Mark Mangino and Mike Stoops, Chuck Long has moved on to become head coach at San Diego State. Best of luck, Chuck. Winning gets a little harder now, but life won't be much tougher than it was this year at Oklahoma, where Long was a scapegoat for some of the Sooners' offensive problems. Time to go.

My gosh, Magesh

Magesh Chandran Panchanathan, 22, UTD's latest chess hero, outpointed six world-ranked players to win UTD's Grandmaster Invitational, sanctioned by FIDE, the world's governing chess body. Next up: UTD goes for a third straight title in college chess' biggest tournament, the Pan Ams, in Miami Dec. 27-30.

## THUMBS DOWN

Two for Texas

The Positive Coaching Alliance released its Bottom 10 Moments in Sports for 2005, and Texas claims two of the top three: The gunshot wound of Canton coach Gary Joe Kinne, allegedly attacked by an angry parent, and the Houston

high school football coach who suited up over-age kids and still lost. At least we weren't No. 1. That honor goes to the Pennsylvania youth baseball coach who paid one of his kids \$25 to bean an autistic teammate so he couldn't play. Nice going, guys.

Cuba: Out

The U.S.' efforts to keep Cuba out of the World Baseball Classic in March is hailed as an effort to promote freedom. But who's it hurting? Castro or Cubans? Said Antonio Mayeta, brother of a Cuban baseball player: "This is about sports, not politics. In Cuba, baseball is our culture. Everyone was so anxious to see these guys." Hardly seems like we're winning hearts and minds here.

C'mon, Roger

The last great hope for the Rangers' pitching staff, Roger Clemens, tells us he won't decide until after Christmas if he wants to come back, let alone pitch here. What a Scrooge.