



**ST. LOUIS BLUES.**

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## **Laila Anderson Inspires a City**

The St. Louis Blues are Stanley Cup Champions for the first time in franchise history. Since joining the league in 1967, the organization has always had a loyal, passionate fan base. One super-fan, however, had a special bond with the team and players like no other. 11-year-old Laila Anderson was the inspiration that fueled the Blue's Stanley Cup run which resulted in their first championship in 53 years.

Laila grew up in St. Louis, Missouri with her parents Scott and Heather Anderson. She went to school and played sports like every other kid. She lived a pretty normal life until two years ago. Laila received news that would go on to change not only her life forever, but an entire city.

“One day she got out of the car and she collapsed,” Heather said, “She threw up and couldn't answer simple questions. At the ER they thought she was just dehydrated.”

Unfortunately, it was much more than that. Laila underwent a series of tests to find what caused the episode. After several weeks, she was diagnosed with an extremely rare genetic disease called Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH). Only 15 other children in the world have been diagnosed with it. It is a potentially fatal condition where white blood cells build up in and damage organs and destroy other blood cells.

Laila's treatment was long and strenuous, but Laila fought hard every step of the way. She was treated at St. Louis Children's Hospital where she was visited by St. Louis Blues forward, Alexander Steen, along with others. Laila had always been a Blue's fan, but this act of kindness went a long way with her.

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Heather remembers a player saying to Laila, “Look at us, we’re missing teeth, we’ve been beat up, so you’re one of us.” She added, “That completely changed her outlook.”

Laila promised the visiting players that she wouldn’t give up in her fight against the disease. In return, the players said they would fight until the end in their quest of winning a championship. The timeline of Laila’s diagnosis and treatment lined up with the Blue’s Stanley Cup run. Their paths crossed when Laila was cleared to attend Game 3 of the Western Conference Finals in St. Louis.

“I was instantly bawling. I can’t believe we’re here. And I can already taste that Stanley Cup,” Laila said.

The video of Laila reacting to her mother sharing the good news went viral. Then, when people heard more about Liala and her story, the city of St. Louis instantly fell in love. Laila also went to Game 4 and Game 6 of the series, where she witnessed her favorite team become Western Conference Champions.

Only one series separated the Blues from earning their first Stanley Cup in over five decades. The team had so much to play for, including for their city, fans, and alumni. Laila’s inspiring story gave every player one more reason to win.

When asked about Laila impacting the players, defenseman and Laila’s favorite player Colton Parayko said, “Of course. One hundred percent. She’s meant a lot. It’s hard to describe from my standpoint. She’s taught me a lot from outside of hockey. Because there is so much more to life than hockey.”

The final series went the distance, but the Blues prevailed. She traveled all the way to Boston to watch her team close out the cup-clinching game. Laila joined the team on the ice and hoisted the Stanley Cup over her head with the help of her favorite player. As promised, the team delivered the best gift Laila could ever dream of.

The St. Louis Blues are one of 31 teams in the National Hockey League. The team joined the league in 1967 and is currently coached by Craig Berube. For more information, please visit [www.nhl.com/blues](http://www.nhl.com/blues).