

If fears are confirmed after he sees lymphoma specialist, expect him to battle all-out, just as he plays.

As it turns out, the fight of Eric Berry's life has nothing to do with a torn knee ligament or helping the Chiefs (finally) win a playoff game or anything at all to do with football.

The Chiefs' star safety will see a lymphoma specialist in his hometown of Atlanta this week, trying to find a definitive answer for a mass in the right side of his chest. His season with the Chiefs is over.

Lymphoma is a cancer of the immune system. If the fears of Berry and those around him are confirmed, he will immediately transition from one of the Chiefs' richest and most famous players to a fight he hopes will end with him being the team's most famous cancer survivor.

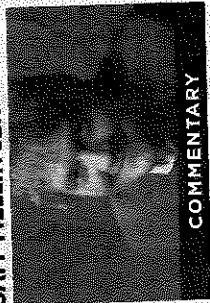
Details are hard to come by, and Berry deserves the chance to attack this however he and his family want. This is a fight that nobody asks for, but if this is Berry's path it is hard to imagine him battling it with anything other than relentless force.

According to various sources, about 80,000 new cases of lymphoma will be diagnosed in our country this year. Depending on the type of lymphoma and stage which it has progressed, treatment can include chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery. Survival rates depend on many factors, but are generally above 50 percent and can be as high as 90 percent.

There is at least one other recent example of a NFL player fighting a lymphoma diagnosis.

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COMMENTARY

MELLINGER: Berry will have lots of support

FROM B1

David Quessenberry, a sixth-round pick of the Houston Texans in 2013, was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's T-cell lymphoblastic lymphoma in June. He has remained involved with team activities through seven rounds of chemo.

Jon Lester, the star pitcher who is currently a free agent after pitching for the Red Sox and A's, was diagnosed with anaplastic large cell lymphoma in 2006 and the next year won the clinching game of the World Series for Boston.

Mario Lemieux is probably sports' most famous survivor, playing five seasons of a Hall of Fame career after his diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease — which makes up about 10 percent of all lymphomas, and is among the most curable forms of cancer.

Everyone's fight is their own, of course, but if this becomes Berry's fight, he will engage it with an incredible amount of support. He comes from a strong family, with two loving parents and twin younger brothers who happen to play football at Tennessee, where Eric starred.

These types of things are hard to measure, but Berry is one of the Chiefs' most respected and well-liked teammates. He is wildly talented, but without any of

the diva attitude that sometimes comes with highly-paid top draft picks.

A lot of men in their early 20s — football stars and otherwise — celebrate their youth late into the night. Berry became known for gathering teammates to watch game film after dinner. If you watch closely before games and on the sidelines, you notice he's



Berry

one of the players who's always "circled up," football-speak for the one in the middle of a huddle who's doing the talking and encouraging.

In high school, Berry volunteered at a dentist's office. In college, he would sneak into the equipment room the night before games to help the team managers polish the helmets.

Berry has a reputation for conscientiousness. He is substance over style, the guy known in high school and college for handing the ball to the referee after a big interception or touchdown. One of the things he's proudest of during his time at Tennessee is that after drawing a pass-interference flag as a freshman, he was never penalized again.

With the Chiefs, he is constantly thanking the men

and women who cook and serve the team meals.

He's the one hugging the flight attendant on the plane and donating backpacks full of school supplies to local kids.

He jumped at the opportunity to be an official spokesman for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Kansas City, and has been intimately involved in the planning of an annual fundraiser at Arrowhead Stadium.

That's at least part of why the news of what Berry may be facing shook the ground around the NFL, and particularly with the Chiefs.

From backups to chairman Clark Hunt, an outpouring of support for Berry spilled out from the organization.

Berry released a statement through the team in which he expressed gratitude for the support, shock at the diagnosis, and confidence in his doctors.

"I will be back!" he said.

That's the attitude his teammates and friends would expect from him.

It's the attitude he'll need if he's indeed faced with the fight of his life.

To reach Sam Mellinger, call 816-234-4365 or send email to smellinger@kcstar.com. Follow him on Twitter: @mellinger. For previous columns, go to KansasCity.com.