

## Episode 5- The Cougar Red Friday King

*Sameer the Red shares why he goes all-out every Cougar Red Friday, what to feed the campus squirrels, and the benefits of being present and involved at UH, especially for commuters like him.*

*[Theme music begins]*

Lauren: Welcome to the University of Houston Office of Admissions official CoogCast. I'm here with the man, the myth, the UH legend, Sameer the Red, AKA UH Squirrel King. Sameers known to have the most epic Cougar Red Friday costumes, so drumroll please for Sameer the Red!

\*imitates drumroll with hands\*

*[Theme music fades out]*

Sameer: What's up, Coogs? Happy to be here.

Lauren: So can you actually tell our listeners what you're wearing right now?

Sameer: Yes I can. Alright, lets see. So today I went for the Cougar Red Friday King look. So you know I got my royal robe, I got the crown on, got a nice like Prince type jacket with like gold accents. For the base layer, you I got some red pants, I got a red vest, tie, dress shirt. You know, looking all snazzy. I got red shoes on, red gloves, I actually have UH socks on here, too.

Lauren: Oh wow!

Sameer: And, finally, I actually have a Cougar Red Friday shirt on underneath, like you know those 'On Fridays We Wear Red' shirts? You can't see it, but it's there, just so you know.

Lauren: *(laughs)* And I can attest, he has gone all out today, and he goes all out on every Friday. I see you walking around campus giving out candy, which we'll get into in just a little bit. But, what makes you passionate about U of H? Is it the sports? Are you a first gen? Are you from a family of Cougars? Did you just wake up one day and were super stoked and spirited? Or have you always been like this?

Sameer: So I'm actually a first gen student, so no, no family of Cougars. I think I'm actually the first person in my family to go to college. As for sports, honestly, I'm more of a nerd. *(laughs)* I'm into like Marvel stuff. I actually got into this Cougar Red Friday stuff, cause you know, my favorite color is red and I like that my school has so much red around me. And its just great.

Lauren: So, you're a Marvel fan, what's your favorite Marvel movie?

Sameer: End Game! Come on.

Lauren: End Game was really good.

Sameer: Like it's the best one. There's no question.

Lauren: I agree. Are you going to watch the Spider Man one?

Sameer: Yes, I'm going to Spider Man: No Way Home at least three times, in costume. Full Spider Man costume every time.

Lauren: Oh my gosh, I love that you go all-out every single time. Okay getting back to the original plot, *(laughs)* so everyone does know you as The Squirrel King on campus. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Sameer: So, for The Squirrel Society, that's actually an organization I started my freshman year. What happened was, I missed my bus. So, I had to go back and sit in front of library while I was waiting. I saw three different people feeding the squirrels. So I joked about starting the Squirrel club, and this girl tells me I should do it. And I was like, you know what, one person agrees with me, I'm going to do it. And I think within two days we had like 200 people in the Group Me. A few days later, I actually got Beto O'Rourke to say our club slogan, go Squoogs. That was so funny. It was amazing. So, right now, we're up to 700 members. But basically, what we like to do is go out and feed squirrels. We watch movies. I want to spread awareness about what to feed the squirrels. A lot of people mistakenly feed them salted nuts, but sodium is not good for them. When I see that, I can say 'Oh hey, here is what you can do instead'.

Lauren: I'm actually really glad that you said that because I got sad about this... when COVID happened, nobody was on campus feeding the squirrels. Are you in any other clubs or involved in other things?

Sameer: Yes. I'm a staffer for the UH Democrats. I just joined CoogTV yesterday; I haven't done anything yet.

Lauren: You joining CoogTV is so on-brand for you. *(laughs)* I'm excited to see what comes out of that. What are you majoring in?

Sameer: I'm actually a management major on the applied leadership track. Bauer, great school, would recommend. I'm planning on minoring in political science. I started off in engineering, but first few classes... and I was like I can't do this. *(laughs)* Engineering is...

Lauren: Hard (*laughs*).

Sameer: It's difficult, yeah. If you can get through it, very much recommend it because you can get a great job. But it is hard.

Lauren: And what do you want to do with this degree after?

Sameer: Well, I chose management and I'm planning on going for a political science minor because I do want to get into government. So some kind of management position in government, like an elected official or something like that.

Lauren: So how would you say being so involved in the multiple things that you mentioned has made your college experience better?

Sameer: Well, for one, its made it a lot more fun. Like I don't think I would have gotten as much enjoyment out of it as I do in college if I didn't do these things, like the squirrel society, Cougar Red Friday. Cause you know, you can just go to classes, but you need something more than that. You need to get involved, you need to have fun, find some friends and do things with them. Cause if you just try to do it alone, only focusing on academics, you'll just get burned out if you do just that. So you need to find something else to do. But, yeah, it's given me a lot of opportunities, like I've had some videos with the University of Houston, there was this one CRF video where we went out and were handing out violations. (*laughs*)

Lauren: Yeah I saw that!

Sameer: Me and Shasta were handing out violations. Funny thing about that, the reason they had me in the video so much is because Shasta can't talk. So, they needed someone to explain why they were getting a violation. So that's what I was doing there. That, and this podcast! I never expected to be on a podcast like this! That was unexpected, so thank you for that.

Lauren: Yeah! Do you live on campus or do you commute?

Sameer: I commute. I actually use the Sugarland shuttle.

Lauren: Oh wow! Okay so that, to me, speaks even more that you're on campus all the time and you don't even have to be! You could just go to your classes and go home.

Sameer: Exactly! I only have classes two days a week, but I still try to come all five days every week.

Lauren: You're so committed, I love it! (*laughs*)

Sameer: I actually come on Fridays just for Cougar Red Friday, you know, I gotta be here!

Lauren: Yeah, you gotta show up! I love it! So, do you have any advice to those who may be struggling to come out of their shell, whether they do live on campus or they are commuters and having a bit of a struggle of finding things to do while on campus, like how you said, you come no matter what, maybe some people want to be involved, but they're not sure how to even go about that.

Sameer: Yeah, I have a couple. First of all, be yourself, alright? Like just do what you want to do. Because no matter what you're doing, not a lot of people will pay attention to what you're doing. Like, no one cares about that outfit you're so nervous about. Wear it!

Lauren: Aw, yeah!

Sameer: You can wear what you want, you can go all out. You wanna come here in a costume? Go ahead, do it! Like some people will enjoy it, but no one's gonna be rude. I mean, sometimes it happens in my case, but for the most part, most people don't care enough to do that. Just be yourself.

Lauren: Mhm.

Sameer: And then join organizations. Like, there's like 500 different organizations on this campus, I'm sure you'll find one that you like. You can find a lot of friends that way. That's how I found a lot of my friends. Stay active in the GroupMes. At least in your freshman year, that's where you can make a lot of friends, that's where I made a lot of my friends. Like pretty much the first week I already had a bunch of friends just by being active in the GroupMe.

I hand out candy to people wearing red. Honestly if you give people things, they will like you. (*laughs*) Like if you give people candy, they will like you! And it'll make their days brighter, cause it's a really nice thing to do. Like maybe someone's down and then, oh, there's this guy coming out in a huge costume and he's just giving me candy, like in the Kool-Aid man costume, I was giving out Kool-Aid! I'm sure that made a lot of people's days better.

This actually reminds me of this video I watched, and it was called the Lollipop Moment or something, where this guy was giving out lollipops to people, right? And he was telling the story of how it made someone's day a lot brighter and it was such a good day for them, right? But he didn't even remember it. Like some things that seemed like a small impact from your side, it could be a huge impact on someone else. So just be kind to people. Say hey to people, just have fun.

Lauren: I agree, I feel like UH provides a lot of space for you to be yourself, and like you said, cause I remember my freshman year being like, oh especially like the outfit thing, that was a personal attack! (laughs) Yeah, I was like 'I don't know if this outfit looks good or not,' but in the end, like at the end of my freshman year, I was wearing like full on sweatpants, maybe even just a onesie, because it was cold outside, to school and like nobody cares! And people actually compliment you and actually like the fact that you're going out of the norm. And I feel like UH provides a lot of space for that. And then what you said about doing something small. If you I was an introvert before I was an ambassador, to be honest, I think that always starting small, because it takes a lot to push yourself out there. And starting small, whether that's just handing out candy to people, or saying a compliment to someone that you see, is a great way to start getting yourself out of your shell and eventually reaching your full potential! But yeah, that was really great advice!

Sameer: Yeah, yeah, let me just be clear. I'm not even fully an extrovert. Like you don't have to be the most extroverted person. Honestly, most of the times, I feel a little introverted. I consider myself an ambivert. You don't have to be this person who is super confident in yourself, you just have to go and try to do the thing anyway even though it's scary. Doing this costume stuff, it's scary to do that. Cause like, you are thinking people are going to judge you and stuff. And, maybe some people will, but it's just completely outnumbered by the people who actually love the things you do. So, be yourself.

Lauren: I agree. What you said... The more you do something, the more confidence you will gain from it. So, over time, it will seem like nothing. It's like public speaking, the more you practice, eventually it just gonna feel like nothing. That was really good advice. Can you tell us a little about how your Cougar Red costume started?

Sameer: When I was in my freshman year, I had this professor, it was my Calc 2 professor, Professor Almus, she had a Cougar Red Friday contest in her class every week. She would give the winner like candy or water bottle or something, right? So the first week that happened, I walked in and I won the contest without knowing there was a contest. So after that, my plan was to gradually progress. Add one more item and one more item, but someone in my class—I think his name was Alex, it's been awhile since I've talked to him—he just outshined the next week. He came in with this huge costume and I was just like blinded-sided, you know, I didn't think anyone would ever get to my level. So after that, the next week, I came back and had this huge ring structure, I was wearing like 5 jackets, all the red I could. Sunglasses, mask, everything. It was amazing. So since then, I've started doing a red costume every week. Then, over the pandemic, I've had a lot of time to think. So, I've come up with like 70ish Cougar Red

Friday Costumes. I had a lot of free time to work on that type of stuff. So some that I'll make, some that I'll just buy, like there's a lot of creativity involved in this and like actually trying to think of what red things I can do. And sometimes I'll have an idea and it doesn't work out. Like I'll say one that didn't work out. I was trying to figure out something to do with Lightning McQueen. *(laughs)* I couldn't figure out how to get that right, so I had to scrap it. But you know, you're going to have to have some bad ideas to get a lot of good ideas.

Lauren: Right, Brainstorming is all a part of the process. Alright! So do you have any last-minute words for us?

Sameer: Nothing else to add except, when it's Cougar Red Friday, make sure to wear red and maybe you can get candy if you see me.

Lauren: Right! And if you do, make sure to post and use the hashtag #CougarRedFriday so that way we can see it.

*[Theme music starts]*

Alright, thank you so much for joining me today!

Sameer: Go Coogs!

Lauren: Go Coogs! I'll see y'all in the next episode.

*[Theme music fades out]*