

# Caddy for a Cure



By Erin Golden



Vijay Singh poses with two children afflicted by Fanconi anemia at a Caddy for a Cure charity event.



Caddy for a Cure winner John Harmon (right) watches Phil Mickelson hit a shot at the practice round of the 2008 FBR Open. Caddy for a Cure offers a one-of-a-kind professional sports fantasy while contributing to genetic disease research and education.

Ever had a dream where you're walking the course alongside your favorite player—K.J. Choi or Padraig Harrington, or perhaps Ernie Els or Vijay Singh—and the two of you are chatting like old friends, exchanging tips and waving to the crowd?

As it turns out, that scenario might be more real than you'd think, thanks to the brainchild of longtime PGA TOUR caddie Russ Holden.

After the son of a family friend was born with Fanconi anemia, an inherited condition that typically results in bone marrow failure, leukemia and other types of cancers, Holden decided he needed to do something to help.

"When I held him for the first time that really impacted me," he says. "It really pulls at your heart. I set out 14 years ago with the thought that somehow, somewhere, some way in my lifetime, I want to have some impact on Fanconi anemia."

The idea finally came to him on the golf course, when he was working with two-time Masters champion Bernhard Langer.

"I was walking down the fairways with tens of thousands of people watching, people thinking, 'I'd love to try this for a day, being inside the ropes, having this great experience,'" he says. "So I had this idea, which had been done before, but I guess I was the first one to really make a good business presentation out of it to the PGA TOUR."

In 2003, Holden approached TOUR officials with the idea: auctioning off the chance to caddy for players in the practice round of tournaments, with the proceeds going to Fanconi anemia research and a variety of other charities, including one selected by the participating player. After several conversations, TOUR officials said yes.

That year, Holden began building the organization, auctioning off the chance to caddy at five events and working to raise awareness of the group among the golf community. He set up an account on the online auction site eBay, where all of the players and their available tournament dates were listed for bidding.

By 2005, Caddy for a Cure participants were showing up at major tournaments across the country. In Milwaukee, Wis., businessman and self-described "golf addict" Scott Sanders heard about the organization from a friend. As a father of a child with autism, Sanders says he'd always been interested in charitable giving for worthwhile causes. The chance to give back by caddying for a major golfer was just too good of a chance to pass up.

"I read about the cause and thought very highly of it," Sanders says. "I caddied for Padraig Harrington at Firestone in Akron, Ohio, for the World Golf Championship. It was a fantastic day—to this day I still keep in contact with Padraig and his caddie."



Though he had previously played in a number of pro-am tournaments, Sanders said the chance to caddie for a player allowed him to get closer than he'd ever imagined.

"When you play in a pro-am, you don't get exposure to the pro, but when you caddie for him, you see every shot, every club selection, you get to see what he's thinking," he says. "If you are a golf addict, there is no other day you could experience that would be on the same level as Caddy for a Cure."

Sanders was so moved by the experience that he kept in touch with Holden, who later invited him to join the organization's board. Holden also introduced Sanders to 14-year-old Christian Collins, the boy with Fanconi anemia who had inspired the entire project and is now its honorary spokesman. That meeting, Sanders says, was just as important as his time on the course with Harrington.

"Christian and I talk or text every day, and I can tell you I love the little guy," Sanders says. "He's one of the most special people I've met in my life. He's changed my life, and he's why I have so much passion for Caddy for a Cure."

In just three years, Caddy for a Cure has donated approximately \$100,000 to charities, including the Fanconi Anemia Research Fund. Slowly but surely, the increased attention and donations are helping to make a difference,

says Christian's father, Chris Collins. Along with Christian, the family has a 9-year-old son, Calen, who also suffers from the condition.

"Christian and Calen's life expectancy with the mutation they have is about four and a half years, but they're 14 and 9 now," Collins says. "They've both undergone bone marrow transplants, and both are going well right now. My wife and I firmly believe there's a reason they're still here. We want to do everything we can for them to deliver their message, whatever that might be, and to try to make the best of it."

Holden has high hopes for the 2008 season and has already signed on a number of players, including Zach Johnson, Phil Mickelson, Boo Weekley and John Daly. He hopes that this year more players and participants will hear about the organization and sign on to help out for a unique cause and an unparalleled golf experience."

"Imagine shooting free throws with Shaq, or riding in the passenger side of Jeff Gordon's car as he warms up for the Daytona 500—it's never going to happen," he says. "But golf is such a unique game that allows us this opportunity to do something like this. We have a real good thing going."

For more information about Caddy for a Cure, Fanconi anemia and how you can participate, visit [www.caddyforacure.com](http://www.caddyforacure.com).

*Erin Golden writes from Bend, Ore.*



Caddy for a Cure winner Fred Keel watches Adam Scott hit a drive during the practice round of the 2007 AT&T National.



Caddy for a Cure winner Stuart Lestch watches Angel Cabrera hit a shot at the practice round of the 2008 World Golf Championships - CA Championship.



Zach Johnson (right) poses with a child afflicted by Fanconi anemia.



Tiger Woods poses with a child afflicted by Fanconi anemia.



Caddy for a Cure Winner Stephanie Boyles with Retief Goosen at the 2006 Zurich Classic



Vijay Singh walking with Caddy for a Cure winner Michael Brown during a practice round at the 2008 FBR Open.