

Carrying the Bag for a Good Cause

Russ Holden founded Caddy For A Cure as a way to raise funds and make a difference

By Tony L. Starks

PGA Professional Russ Holden had an encounter that would forever change his life while he was the PGA director of golf at Woodfield Country Club in Boca Raton, Fla. Chris Collins – a former minor league pitcher drafted by the California Angles in 1985 – walked into Woodfield's golf shop wanting to work in the golf industry without interest in making money. Holden gave Collins a job and he quickly climbed the ladder to become assistant professional; the two built a friendship that would last a lifetime.

Six months later the former pitcher's wife gave birth to a son, Christian, who was born with Fanconi Anemia, a rare bone marrow disease that often causes birth defects in children, requires a bone marrow transplant and makes those afflicted more susceptible to certain cancers.

"It was my first touch with a family member – someone who felt like a family member – having a devastating disease like this," Holden says. "I knew that somehow, someday in my life I wanted to be able to do something that would raise awareness and raise funds to help eradicate this disease."

While working as director of golf in Boca Raton, Holden befriended Bernhard Langer, who is a resident of Woodfield Country Club. Little did he know that friendship would blossom into a five-year experience as the caddy for the top winner in PGA European Tour history, a two-time Masters Champion and captain for the winning European side at the 2004 Ryder Cup. Holden was able to mobilize the relationships he built with the PGA Tour and its players to launch a unique fundraising venture: Caddy For A Cure.

Holden is no longer at Woodfield Country Club and now has dedicated himself full-time to the Caddy For A Cure organization. "I have seen many charities helped as a result of our efforts, and I am enjoying this experience beyond my wildest dreams. I'm hanging out with the best players in the world on a daily basis, while helping immensely

to change the lives of others," said Holden.

The company provides a one-of-a-kind golf experience: the opportunity to caddy for a PGA Tour Professional during a practice round at an official PGA Tour event. Caddy For A Cure is a non-profit organization that donates 100 percent of its raised funds to charity. The proceeds are split between the Fanconi Anemia Research Fund, the participating PGA Tour Professionals' charity of choice, the PGA Tour event site's charity of choice and the PGA Tour Caddies Benevolent Fund.

Caddy For A Cure offers its unique fundraising opportunity through silent auction on the organization's Web site, www.caddyforcure.com. Ray Schulte is one of the many donors who have combined the love of golf with the chance to donate to a good cause. At last month's Honda Classic at PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., Schulte had the experience of a lifetime caddying for Fred Funk in the Wednesday pro-am, "It was tremendous. To be able to go inside the ropes with one of the best players in world and see firsthand how he manages and approaches the game, I enjoyed every moment of it," says Schulte of his experience with Funk. "I happened to come

across the Web site, caddyforcure.com, and was intrigued by what they're trying to accomplish. And not only that, the fact that it is for such a good cause made my decision to participate instantaneous."

The winning bids have ranged from \$2,000 to \$12,000 and have come from a broad spectrum of donors, "We've had people from all walks of life participate in our program," Holden says. "We had a father-son team come out; we had a delightful lady caddy for Retief Goosen in New Orleans who

wasn't much bigger than his bag."

Christian Collins, who recently underwent a bone marrow transplant in Berlin, is now a vibrant 14-year-old despite his limitations. He is also the national spokesperson for Caddy For A Cure. "Christian is a perfect role model for the organization and people with Fanconi Anemia," says Holden in a revering tone.

The list of PGA Tour players who have participated in the charitable cause is star-studded: Funk and Goosen have been joined by Phil Mickelson, Justin Rose, Vijay Singh and many more in participating in the Caddy For A Cure program. For more information on how you or your members can become a part of this extraordinary opportunity to give back, visit www.caddyforcure.com. ■

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Holden's friendship with 2004 European Ryder Cup Captain Bernhard Langer (pictured with Holden) helped pave the way to creating Caddy For a Cure.