

How charitable are Boston's prominent professional athletes? *The Boston Globe*

October 23, 2005

DOUG FLUTIE

Quarterback raised national awareness of childhood autism

He started with a goal as modest as the \$25,000 signing bonus he received from the Buffalo Bills in 1998. Doug Flutie gave half his bonus to a charitable foundation honoring fellow quarterback Jim Kelly's son, Hunter, who was suffering from a neurological disorder. Flutie heeded Kelly's advice by using the remaining \$12,500 to launch a foundation named for his son, Doug Jr., who is autistic.

Doug and Laurie Flutie initially hoped to raise enough money to help a few other families coping with childhood autism. But then their little foundation hit it big. In a perfect storm of publicity, Flutie parlayed the rollout of Flutie Flakes cereal with appearances on Rosie O'Donnell's television show and an MCI commercial into a bonanza of national awareness of autism.

In seven years, the foundation has raised nearly \$7.5 million and made its largest financial impact with the LADDERS program (Learning and Developmental Disabilities Evaluation and Research Service) at Massachusetts General Hospital. The program has received more than \$300,000 from the Flutie foundation in the last four years.

Yet the Fluties have focused largely on grassroots projects, epitomized by a sports program in the Marlborough public schools. With nearly \$50,000 in grants from the Flutie Foundation in the last three years, the program has enabled autistic children aged 5 to 13 to play sports such as baseball, basketball, and flag football.

"It gives the children a chance to learn sportsmanship and have fun in an environment where they don't have to worry about peers being better than them or picking on them," said Andy Bernabei, a program coordinator. "We couldn't do it without the Flutie Foundation."

CURT SCHILLING

With wife's help, pitcher does all he can to strike out ALS

However long it takes to find a cure for ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), the day it happens there will likely be a tribute to Curt Schilling. Just as Ted Williams helped lead the Jimmy Fund's fight to curb childhood cancer, Schilling has devoted nearly 13 years to bankrolling the battle against ALS.

With his wife, Shonda, Schilling has donated nearly \$1 million to the ALS Association and helped raise an additional \$6 million. They also have raised \$1 million for their SHADE Foundation to fight skin cancer.

"Before Curt arrived, very few people knew what ALS was, but he has generated tons of awareness and financial support," said Scott Edelstein of the Massachusetts chapter of the ALS Association. "The impact has been absolutely phenomenal."

The Schillings, whose generosity recently was underscored by their housing nine victims of Hurricane Katrina, also have written \$500,000 checks to the United Way and the Jimmy Fund.

"When you're young, you tend to do things like that because you want people to think you're a nice guy," Schilling said. "At some point, I realized that I'm doing this not because I want people to think I'm a nice guy. I'm doing this because I think it's the right thing to do."

Schilling rarely misses a fund-raising opportunity, and his next major project is a pro-am celebrity Texas Hold 'Em tournament in November to benefit ALS research. He said he is working fast because his opportunity is brief.

"I will never have a chance to impact as many lives as I can while I'm wearing this uniform," he said in the Red Sox dugout at Fenway Park.

CAM NEELY

Family losses inspired Bruins great to even greater goals

Endings came too quickly for Cam Neely. The NHL Hall of Famer and former Bruins star lost his mother, Marlene, when she was 47, and his father, Michael, at 56, both to cancer. Then injuries cut short his hockey career in 1996 at age 31.

But Neely wasted no time committing the rest of his days to helping others face painful losses. In the last decade, the Cam Neely Foundation for Cancer has raised nearly \$14 million to improve the lives of families affected by cancer, primarily at Tufts-New England Medical Center.

"Because I was able to push a puck around a sheet of ice and have enough access to the media to explain why this meant so much to me and my family, we've been able to make an impact," Neely said. "It's been extremely rewarding."

The foundation funded the creation of the Neely House, which has provided a bed-and-breakfast style home for thousands of cancer patients and their families at the hospital. The foundation also has launched an array of medical initiatives, including the Neely Center for Clinical Cancer Research, the Neely Cell Therapy and Collection Center, and the Neely Pediatric Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.

"We've gone out and done what we said we were going to do," said Neely's brother, Scott, the foundation's chief executive. "Donors see that we're funding initiatives that are tangible and have an immediate impact."

The wonder of it is that the Neelys had no experience in philanthropy or developing medical programs when they entered the field.

"What they have done in terms of learning the business and delivering on their promises is really quite remarkable," said Dr. John Erban, chief of hematology and oncology at Tufts-New England Medical Center.

TIM WAKEFIELD

Veteran works his knuckles to the bone to help children

A lot of athletes say they want to help children. Tim Wakefield has made a second career of doing it.

A seven-time nominee for baseball's Roberto Clemente Award for community service, Wakefield has made his greatest impact in his hometown of Melbourne, Fla., where 13 years ago he singlehandedly saved a financially failing therapeutic preschool for children, many with developmental delays.

Wakefield organized a celebrity golf event that raised \$40,000, just enough to keep the Space Coast Early Intervention Center in business. Then he turned the tournament into an annual event that has since raised more than \$2.5 million for the school. He also donated nearly \$500,000 of his own money to the cause.

"We wouldn't be here without Tim Wakefield," said Sally Shinn, the center's executive director.

In Boston, Wakefield has donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Make-a-Wish Foundation and the Franciscan Hospital for Children and has helped raise much more for the hospital and the Jimmy Fund.

"He's our key guy," said Fred Markey, the Franciscan hospital's chief development officer.

A regular visitor to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute -- "We can always call on him at any time," said the Jimmy Fund's Mike Andrews -- Wakefield also treats children from the Franciscan Hospital to visits to Fenway Park through his "Wakefield's Warriors" program.

"I was taught by my parents that it doesn't matter how big your house, how many cars you have, or how big your bank account is," Wakefield said. "What matters is whether you can make a difference in the life of a child."

MO VAUGHN

Local favorite vows to return and work on housing problem

One of the godfathers of giving among Boston athletes may soon be back.

Mo Vaughn, who remains revered by many in the city for his personal philanthropy, has met with Mayor Thomas M. Menino to try to renew his effort to make the inner city a better place to live, particularly for the needy.

In eight years with the Red Sox in the 1990s, Vaughn became renowned for giving back to the community. He raised more than \$1 million to fund the Mo Vaughn Youth Development Program (now Urban Dreams), which has nurtured hundreds of children in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. He donated \$109,000 to St. Francis House for the homeless. And he quietly steered much more of his personal wealth to charitable causes.

Now, Vaughn is on a new mission: developing livable affordable housing. He started in the Bronx, where he bought and has begun rehabbing 286 units of Section 8 housing, and he is in the process of buying another 175 units of low-income housing in Nassau County that he plans to refurbish.

Next stop: Boston.

"We're coming that way," he said in an interview. "The mayor and I are close friends, and he has been very helpful. I'm looking at several properties in Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester."

Vaughn, 34, who earned more than \$100 million in baseball before he retired last year, described his real estate project as a natural extension of his previous interest in helping the needy.

"It's such a cutthroat business," he said. "Some of these people have owned these properties for 20 years and haven't put a dollar back into them. I want to run the properties the right way."

Trying to help others, Vaughn said, has helped him face retirement from baseball.

"It gets kind of quiet when you stop playing the game and people stop saying your name," he said. "But if you find something that keeps you interested and motivated, it can still be like playing on a team." ■