

Golfing for Good

Golf Pro Brett Shoopman fights back against melanoma, raising awareness through the annual Shoopy Scramble golf tournament

BY GENEVIEVE COLMAN

Four years ago, golf pro Brett Shoopman got a phone call that made his knees buckle.

“Brett, you saved my life,” declared the man on the other end of the line.

The man had been watching a spot on his chest for a while and made an appointment to have it checked right away. “It was malignant melanoma, and I had surgery,” he told Brett. “All because of you, I’m going to make it.”

It wouldn’t be the only time Brett got a phone call like that. As a fierce advocate for melanoma awareness, he’d gotten his own diagnosis of malignant melanoma, the most severe form of skin cancer, right above his liver, in 2012.

“I watched it grow for five months thinking it was a mole,” Brett says. “I was totally wrong.”

After surgery, he thought, “If I’m that naive, who else doesn’t know what to look for? Who else will watch a spot grow and not know?”

With that, the Shoopy Scramble, a golf tournament benefiting Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center, was born. So far, the tournament has raised \$146,995.

Growing up with Golf

Using his love of golf to raise awareness for such a deeply personal cause seemed fitting. A Palm Springs native, Brett has been playing golf for most of his life.

“It was great growing up here,” he remembers. “Your only options were to play golf, play tennis or be on the swim team. I chose all three.”

Brett was an AAU (an organization for amateur athletes) champion swimmer at an early age, but when his dad, a successful chef to Hollywood stars like Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, saw his son’s interest in swimming starting to fade, he suggested golf.

“I had no patience and my dad wouldn’t teach me — he felt unless I learned patience, I’d never be a good golf pro. But I showed him. I taught myself,” he quips.

When Brett was 12, his dad was diagnosed with esophageal cancer and treated at Eisenhower Medical Center by Board Certified Medical Oncologist Philip Dreisbach, MD.

Although his illness kept him from the course, Brett’s dad supported and motivated his son as he gained success as a golfer at Palm Springs High School.

Today, Brett runs one of the busiest golf shops in the desert, Desert Willow, and sells out both of Desert Willow Golf Resort’s courses for the Shoopy Scramble each year with 256 players — a major feat.

Proud Partners

Partnering with Eisenhower seemed like a natural fit. “I already had respect for this hospital because Eisenhower gave my dad an extra seven years,” Brett expresses gratefully. Three decades after Dr. Driesbach treated Brett’s dad, he’s now Brett’s oncologist.

The money raised from the tournament has funded six melanoma awareness lectures and provided 612 free skin cancer screenings, as well as patient support services at Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center that include nutrition advice, exercise classes, support groups, healing touch massage and bereavement counseling.

A portion of the money raised from this year’s tournament will help Eisenhower purchase the revolutionary Vectra® WB360 — 3D Body Imaging System that helps detect melanoma much earlier than previous technologies, greatly increasing survival rates for those with early detection. The system will be the thirteenth of its kind in use worldwide, the seventh in the United States and the first on the West Coast. Brett is extremely proud the tournament could help Eisenhower Health acquire technology that will do so much good for the residents of his hometown.

Continuing the Fight

When Brett’s cancer returned in February 2018, he was able to catch it right away.

“For five years it’s been on the back of my mind that it could return,” he says quietly.



“This tournament is probably the best thing I could have done in my life.” – BRETT SHOOPMAN

In the operating room, Brett watched Board Certified General Surgeon David Hyams, MD, and a room full of nurses and technicians prepare for surgery. He said, “I know you’re all here to save my life as soon as I close my eyes.” It was comforting to Brett to know the healers in the room had so much education, training and experience, and he knew he was in good hands.

Today, Brett affirms he feels more confident than ever, on and off the course.

“I just birdied 18 to shoot 71 the other day,” he says as he smiles. “Not only have I beaten cancer twice, but to shoot under par again feels good.”

He’s ready to take on year seven of the tournament.

Although he’s modest about his efforts, Palm Desert Mayor Jan Harnik declared the first Monday in May as “Brett Shoopman Day,” the same day as Melanoma Monday, a national day designated to raise awareness.

“This tournament is probably the best thing I could have done in my life,” Brett concludes.

Each year when he gets to present the check to Eisenhower with the money raised from the tournament he says, “It’s the greatest day. It’s overwhelming.”

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To participate in, or support, the Shoopy Scramble on April 28, 2019, please visit shoopyscramble.org for details.

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PHOTO: ETHAN KAMINSKY