



True Champions!

By **Kris Pinkerton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Oshkosh Country Club



I was glad to be on the road again. Even at 65 mph, Orlando could not fade into the background fast enough. As my first Amateur Tour experience out of state, it was not a good one. In fact, to remove any doubt, I played badly.

As our truck rolled onto the interstate, I settled back and began to read the newspaper that I had specifically saved to pass time on the way home.

While reading, I

tried to let the weekend pass into a bad memory. Yet having shanked at the first tee, almost hitting the tent where the gal was seated finalizing registration, was too much! I scanned the front page, then flipped to the financial section. The market seemed as unpredictable as my swing. I continued on reading the paper, looking for people who were more miserable than I. Maybe Dennis Rodman or Mike Tyson had done something else stupid that would make me feel better about myself after my dismal performance in the tournament.

As I read through the paper, reacquainting myself with the events of the world that exist outside of golf, I came upon a double full page ad, something about kids being true champions. I scanned the ad quickly and continued on. However, I returned to the ad and read it more thoroughly, passing time and avoiding conversation with Todd. I did not feel like talking, but more importantly, he might ask me how I shot...for the twenty ninth time that day.

The advertisement honored children who have overcome or continue to face monumental health problems, every day of their lives. Along with short details of their ordeals, were pictures of each child, all smiling

as if life had not dealt them the rotten hand that had come their way. First I glanced at a couple, then read each one more intently. The following are some excerpts of their situation:

A five-year old from Utah had leukemia which led to "pokes" and "yucky" medicine. But she endured them with courage and acceptance, and has been cancer free for a year.

An eight-year old boy from West Virginia had "cystic fibrosis, but that has not kept him from earning the President's Physical Fitness Award." An accomplishment I once also tried to achieve.

In California, a seven-year old had an "aneurysm and stroke. She had to re-learn to sit-up, walk, talk and even swallow. Now she dances, sings and tells jokes."

Finally a courageous young man of nine whose combination of "chemotherapy and determination helped him beat undifferentiated abdominal sarcoma. Now he's overcoming another type of cancer, t-cell lymphoma."

Each child's situation brought me back to earlier in the day. While we were preparing to leave the hotel, a new friend stopped to say good-bye. In a positive way, without chuckling, he mentioned that I must surely be disappointed with the weekend. I was! But I also responded that I was going to take inspiration from a Vince Lombardi quote, which stated that it's not if you get knocked down, but whether or not you get up again.

The children whose stories that I read epitomize that quote. During the weekend in Orlando, I had effectively erased all hopes of being invited back next year. Compounded with the fact that I basically shanked my confidence all the way to hell and back. However these kids who are real champions made my problems seem minuscule. In fact, after some thought, I felt a little embarrassed about my own self-pity. These kids made me want to get back up again.

I looked at those pictures for a long time that day in the truck. When we stopped for the evening, I had a new perspective on the hierarchy of what life throws at us. I could not have held a greater admiration for those who face infinitely more difficult challenges than I, each and every day. I am also much more grateful for my family, friends and our collective health. These true champions have admirable spirit. As the sun rises every day, their battle is not for recognition or accolades, but for life itself. ♣