

Keeping His Grip on Life

Golfer Ben Crane has parlayed his good fortune into helping abused and abandoned children around the world

by Jayne Thurber-Smith

Pull Quote: In a sport where men play well into their 60s, Ben wondered if his career was over at 38

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On the Saturday night of the St. Jude Classic PGA tournament in June, Ben Crane was at the top of the leaderboard. Victory was by no means guaranteed, since the end was still a long way off. Rain had delayed completion of the third round. He would have to play his best golf for 12 holes Sunday morning and then through another 18 holes of the fourth and final round in the afternoon. Favourites like Webb Simpson and Phil Mickelson were hot on his heels.

None of that mattered to Ben. He was thankful to be in the lead for the first time in three years, for however briefly. Sunday morning, he told the Associated Press he had only gotten three hours sleep, not because he was worried or partying but because he had some thanking to do. Ben had spent much of the night praying and thanking God that he had finally gotten his game back after almost three years without a win.

“Through hardship, I get closer to Him to find He’s all I need,” Ben smiles. “My job is to seek God first.”

Family Matters

For much of 2012 and 2013, Ben struggled with his game as he battled a disc injury. The wear and tear of playing professional golf for 12 years had taken its toll physically, but he

took it easy and healed during the offseason, hoping to be ready for 2014. However, it took most of the spring to rework his swing to prevent further injury, and when he tried to qualify for the U.S. Open in early June, he missed the cut. In a sport where men play well into their 60s, Ben wondered if his career was over at 38.

But that Sunday evening, Ben took the St. Jude Classic by a stroke and joyfully jumped into the arms of caddie Joel Stock.

As with all his winnings, the paycheque of more than a million dollars was going to be put to good use.

“Winning on the PGA tour is great but the greatest blessing is how much fun it is to be able to give back,” Ben says. “My greatest joy is that my wife and I have been privileged to help a number of people financially through this platform God has given us. It really is more fun to give than receive.”

Ben married his college sweetheart, Heather, in 2002, the same year he entered the pros. They’ve established the Ben & Heather Crane Foundation to further their efforts to raise money and support various organizations that bring hope to the hurting and help underprivileged, abused and abandoned children. Heather has travelled to Southeast Asia to address the tragic issue of child sex trafficking, and Ben and Heather have also travelled with their three children to an orphanage in El Salvador.

“Helping others as a family is so rewarding,” Ben comments. “There’s no question that seeing those orphans while visiting El Salvador took my kids through every emotion. Such as, *Why am I so fortunate? Why did God put me in my loving home?* They now know that the blessed one is supposed to give to the one who isn’t as blessed, and they understand firsthand the joy of giving. It’s great to see that your own kids want to give to charity or to save their money up to help kids in need. They are getting behind our causes.”

Blessed to Bless Others

“The best thing about golfing is being able to share it with other people who matter to you,” Ben continues. “I mean, it’s exciting to win and to play really well, but that’s fleeting. Just days after a win, you’re unsatisfied because you think, *I want to do that*

again. But you get to enjoy it more through your friends and family. My wife and I had no idea this would be our life, and we know we are blessed to be here.”

Ben feels there is no greater gift outside his relationship with God than his relationship with Heather.

“She is so encouraging,” he says. “We experience the highs and lows every marriage does, and depend on God and each other to get through it. She’s inspiring and supportive. Many couples may break up if they’ve gone into the relationship wondering what they can get out of it, not what they can give. My wife is so giving that I’m always trying to catch up with her. Heather is never overcome by current circumstances, because she has an incredible ability to see what the next step is in our life.”

His job obviously requires a lot of travelling and Heather makes the effort to bring the kids on the road with Ben, as competing schedules allow.

“She knows the hard work is worth it,” he says. “Our family is more important than golf and she’s committed to keeping us together as much as possible through the season. Now with school the past two years, they’ve had to stay home more but they’ve still made it to about half of my games.”

With the school year just finishing up, Ben’s family wasn’t able to be present at the St. Jude Classic, but he knew they were with him in spirit as he soaked up his long-awaited victory.

“I do want to celebrate it with my friends and my wife and my kids, who probably watched me play on TV today for the first time and kind of recognize what was going on,” he smiled. “God has taught us so much throughout this journey. It’s not all prosperity, but it’s OK because I learn the most through the hard times. I’m learning in those times to just pray more.”