

Heart of a Tiger: How Corbyn Marquess turned golf into hope for sick kids

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - Corbyn Marquess loves three things with her whole heart: helping people, her hometown of Plainville, and golf. Over the past two summers, she's found a way to bring all three together. And the results have been nothing short of amazing.

Corbyn is a senior at Fort Hays State University. She is studying to become a speech-language pathologist (SLP). An SLP is someone who helps people with difficulty speaking or swallowing. Last spring, Corbyn got some great news: she was accepted into FHSU's fast-track master's program. That means she can start working toward her graduate degree even sooner. It is a big step toward her dream job.

But before we talk about her big fundraiser and her success on the golf course, let's go back to where this story really begins - in a hospital room, with some scary news.

When Corbyn was a junior in high school, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. For a teenager, or anyone really, hearing the word "cancer" can feel like the whole world just stopped. Corbyn had to go through surgery and treatment, and she spent a lot of time in hospitals during a time when most kids her age were just worried about homework and football games.

During that difficult time, Corbyn became well-acquainted with the doctors, nurses, and staff at Children's Mercy in Kansas City. The people there did not just treat Corbyn's illness; they took care of her. Body, mind, and spirit. They made a hard time a little easier, a little less scary, and a lot more hopeful.

Corbyn never forgot the kindness she received at Children's Mercy. She promised herself that one day, she would find a way to give back to the hospital that helped her so much.

That promise became the "Fore the Kids Classic," a golf tournament fundraiser for Children's Mercy. Every dollar raised would go straight to helping other sick kids and their families, just like the hospital had once helped her.

Last year was the tournament's first year, and it was already a success, having raised just under \$13,000. This year, Corbyn decided to go even bigger, setting a goal of \$15,000. That is a lot of money for one person to raise, especially a busy college student. But Corbyn had a plan, a big heart, and a whole community behind her.

She spent months getting ready. She talked to local businesses about donating prizes. She asked friends and family to spread the word. She organized golf teams, planned a raffle, set up an apparel store selling tournament shirts, and made sure everything at the course would run smoothly on the big day. Plainville is a small town, but small towns often have big hearts. People who had never even met Corbyn wanted to help once they heard her story.

Her story took a challenging turn right before the tournament when Corbyn's doctors found spots on her neck, which they believe to be a recurrence of the cancer. She will undergo her second surgery this fall. Receiving this news only three days before the tournament made Corbyn feel "even deeper and stronger" about her mission. Then came tournament day.

Golfers from all over showed up at the course, ready to swing their clubs for a good cause. But it was not just about golf. As players moved from hole to hole, many of them shared their own stories about Children's Mercy — times the hospital had helped someone they loved. Corbyn said hearing those stories and feeling all that community support was among the most touching parts of the whole day.

When the tournament ended, Corbyn could hardly believe the numbers. Her goal had been \$15,000. Instead, the tournament raised nearly \$24,000.

That means in just two years, the Fore the Kids Classic has raised almost \$37,000 for Children's Mercy. Enough money to make a real difference for kids and families going through hard times, just as she had.

Corbyn says she is beyond excited to hand that money over to the hospital. She knows firsthand what that money can do. It is not just numbers on a check. It is comfort for a scared kid. It is support for a worried family. It is hope, delivered by nurses and doctors who care.

What makes Corbyn's story so special is not just the amount of money she raised. It is the reason behind it. She turned one of the scariest experiences of her life into something that helps other people. Instead of just asking "why did this happen to me," she asked, "how can I help someone else?"

Now, as she studies to become a speech-language pathologist, Corbyn is preparing for a career built on the same idea: helping people communicate, connect, and feel supported during hard moments in their lives.

Corbyn's dream is clear. After she finishes her master's degree, she wants to work at Children's Mercy with the people who made such a difference in her life.

"I want to help those kids, day in and day out," she said. "Those kids did not choose this. They are fighting unimaginable battles. It's my passion, my mission in life to be the person who can help."

Fort Hays State is proud of Corbyn. And somewhere in Kansas City, the doctors and nurses at Children's Mercy are probably smiling too, knowing that the kindness they once gave a scared teenage girl came back around, stronger than ever, to help so many more kids in need.