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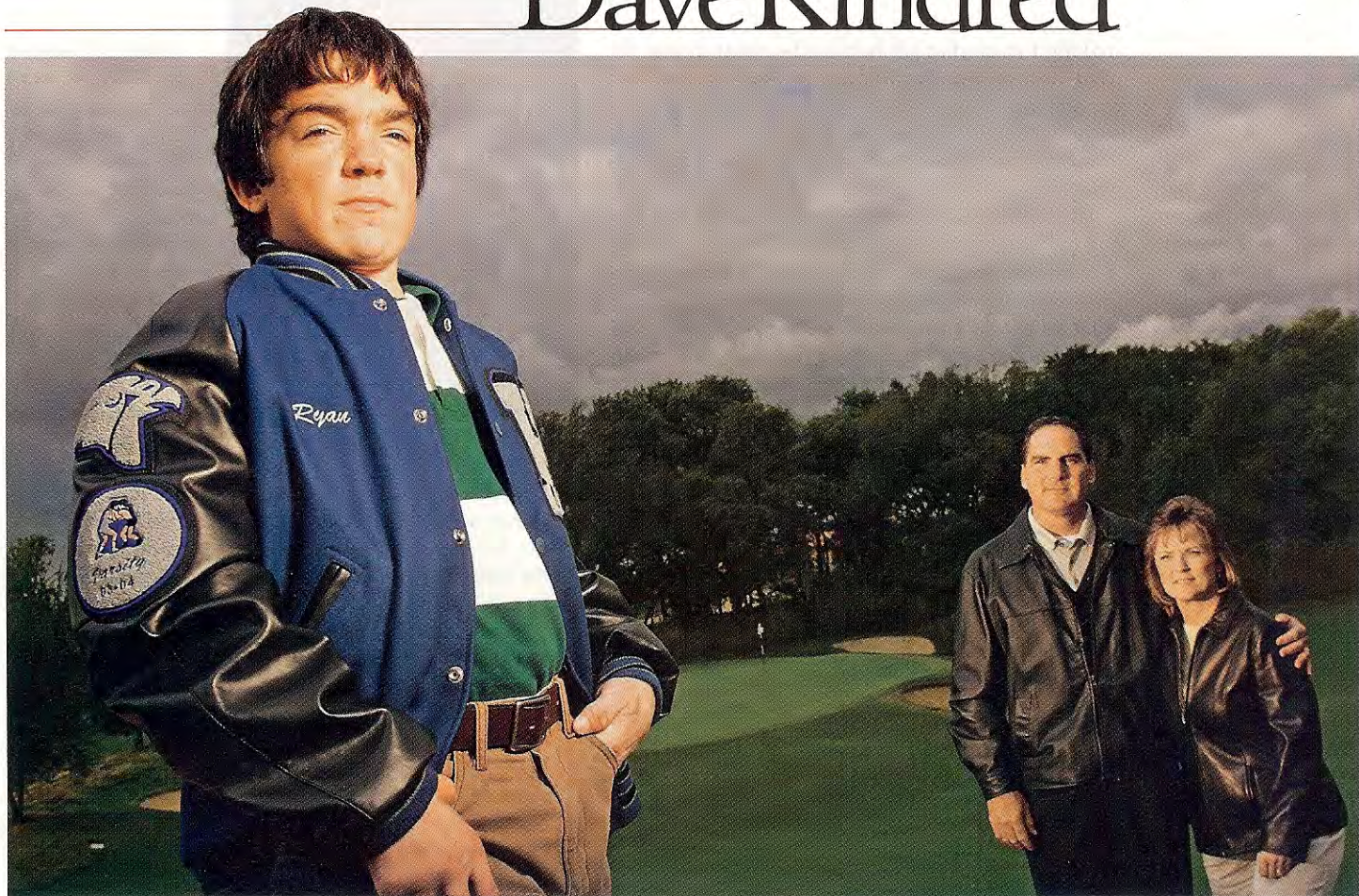
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Dave Kindred



How **Golf and Charity** Came Together to Save a Life

WHEN LAST WE SAW RYAN DANT IN this space, he was 13 years old, 4-feet-7 and 85 pounds, a tiny child who took his Tight Lies 5-wood and whaled away at a ball that sailed over a creek and bounced against a tennis-court fence, after which Ryan did not hit another shot. “No, sir,” he said, “I took the club to my room. I want to save that power.”

Our hero's voice was a bird's chirp, happy as a sunrise.

The question was, how long would the happiness last?

Ryan was born with one of those diseases

that only doctors and scientists can pronounce. They said he would die before he was 10, and if out of some cruel fate he didn't die, he would be an invalid.

But there he was, hitting a golf shot.

“Wow, it really went,” he said.

And here he is, laughing.

He's 16 years old. Suddenly, he's 5-feet-5 and 130 pounds. He's a sophomore in high school. He's the wrestling team's student manager. Take him shopping, you have to drag him out of the mall. When he gets in Dad's car, first thing he does is turn off the Oldies station. Last summer he umpired kids' baseball games and is now

Ryan Dant, 16, is living a normal teenage life thanks to his parents, Mark and Jeanne, and some help from the golf industry.

looking for another job because he needs money for what every teenage boy in America needs money for—to buy a car.

“A two-door sports car,” he says.

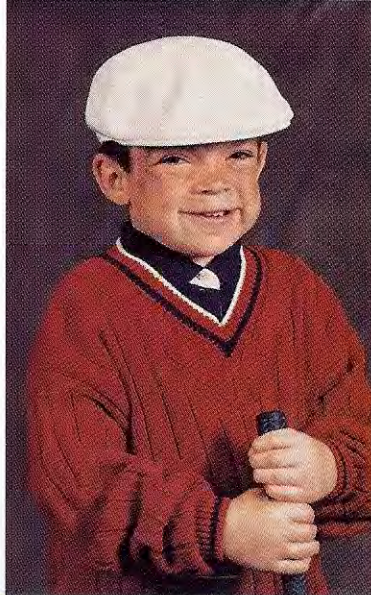
As to what model, he settles for this: “One with wheels.”

Then he thinks of another design feature. “And an engine.”

Laughter here, and sweet laughter it is, and Ryan Dant says, “I’m really a normal teenager.”

Of all the astonishments in the Ryan Dant story, none is more thrilling than to hear him talk about being just another teenager. He’s 16, and he wants to

Ryan at age 10 (right) and two years later at a charity event that raised money for his cause.



They had learned that MPS 1 is so rare, affecting about 3,000 worldwide, that little money is dedicated to finding a cure. So they decided to raise money.

How much they needed, they didn’t know.

How they’d get it, no idea.



They did a bake sale.

Made \$342.

Scientific research into rare diseases is a high-dollar endeavor in which money is measured in stacks of millions, not hundreds. If the Dants were to get serious money for the National MPS Society, they needed more than penny-ante bake sales.

Here’s what they needed.

They needed to get lucky.

They needed to walk past a NO SOLICITATIONS sign and find behind it an angel.

Yes, divine intervention would be nice—and the sooner the better, because a scientist near an MPS 1 breakthrough had come to a critical stage of his project: Without more money, he would have to end his research.

And what would be the odds on all these threads of life intersecting?

A kajillion to one?

“You don’t have enough zeroes,” says Barney Adams.

go to college in his parents’ home state, at either the University of Kentucky or the University of Louisville. He’s 16, and maybe he knew the prognosis and maybe he didn’t, but what’s certain is that for the first time he’s talking about the future, and his father, Mark, says, “That’s huge.”

It is also miraculous.

Ryan Dant has mucopolysaccharidosis, known as MPS 1. His body lacks an enzyme that metabolizes sugar. The sugar suffocates the body’s cell structure. The result is havoc. Growth is stunted and distorted. Joints lock up. Organs fail, including the brain.

The diagnosis was made when Ryan was 3. He suffered headaches so severe he threw up until he fell asleep, exhausted. He was abnormally small with a swollen stomach and enlarged head. He ran stiff-legged. He couldn’t raise his arms to dress. His fingers were fixed in a curl.

The prognosis, death by age 10, sent Mark and Jeanne Dant retreating into grief. For months, the father said, “We didn’t do anything but close the door and cry.”

When the Dants opened the door, they opened it determined to help their son in the only way they could—by finding a cure for the incurable.

MPS 1 is so rare, affecting about 3,000 worldwide, that little money is dedicated to finding a cure.

It was Adams who put up the NO SOLICITATIONS sign. He’d moved his club-making company—two employees, grandly named Adams Golf—from Abilene to a Dallas storefront in hopes of finding more customers. The sign

meant: (1) “We’re busy,” and (2) “We’re poorer than you, anyway.”

But Mark Dant, a police officer in suburban Dallas and a neophyte golfer in October 1992, had heard that golf events raised money for charity. He saw “Adams Golf” in the phone book and walked past the NO SOLICITATIONS sign to tell Barney Adams his story. He left with three or four clubs to auction off.

At the first Ryan Dant golf event, golfers kicked in \$27,000. Bye-bye, bake sales. Hello, The Ryan Foundation for MPS Children.

Each of the next five years, Dant picked up clubs from Adams. Then he heard about Emil Kakkis, a biological chemist and geneticist in California who believed he could develop an enzyme-replacement therapy for MPS 1 patients. He was the scientist about to stop his research.

Cue the angel.

In that mysterious way that mysterious things happen, Barney Adams now had money. He had developed a golf-industry sensation, a low-profile fairway wood called "Tight Lies." He sold 'em by the boatload. So Adams asked Dant how much money the doctor needed.

"Two hundred thousand," Dant said.

Adams made a phone call to Tom Fazio, the golf course architect, and soon enough Dr. Kakkis had the money necessary to carry on research that next earned him a \$5 million deal with BioMarin Pharmaceutical Inc., a biotechnology company that would bring the Kakkis treatment to market. BioMarin is now in for \$100 million.

The treatment is no fun, a four-hour infusion weekly. Nor is it a cure in the sense of ending the disease. But it will save lives, the doctor says. "Ask a parent if it's a cure," he says, "and I know at the least they'd consider it a miracle."

The majority of Kakkis' research was funded by The Ryan Foundation, and the foundation's money, maybe \$2 million, came through a decade of golf events. "Golf raises more money for charity," Adams says, "than all other sports put together by multiples of many."

With golf's help, Ryan Dant's headaches are mostly gone. He is no longer short of breath. He does the infusion treatments at home rather than at a hospital. He has had nine surgeries to correct bone-growth problems but likely won't need any more. He says, "I didn't know I was going to die, but now I think it's a miracle."

Since that bake sale in 1992, Mark Dant says, "The foundation has been our life. It was year-round, every year, trying to find a nickel here and there. Then Barney did the hardest thing of all—ask friends and associates for money. He did it, and for a disease no one ever heard of, and he kept doing it."

For the first time, Ryan is talking about the future.



Barney Adams, Tom Fazio and The Ryan Foundation staged their "Final Event" in the fall of 2004. They raised about \$500,000 at the Westin Stonebriar Resort in Frisco, Tex. "WE WON!" Adams says, though he does add, angelically/pragmatically, "We still need another hundred thousand from somewhere to finish up Dr. Kakkis' final tests."

There are days when Mark Dant hears Ryan call to him. "Want to play catch, Dad?" "Let's shoot some baskets, Dad."

Just normal teenager stuff.

Only now it's enough to make a cop say, "I tear up."

And 13 years after the diagnosis of MPS 1, the family has another life ahead.

"Jeanne and Ryan and I now can think about, well, maybe we'll have grandkids now."

They'd like to retire, maybe while Ryan is in college. They'd build a place on some land outside Louisville.

And then?

"We'll all live happily ever after." 🇺🇸

For more information or to make contributions, visit ryanfoundation.org.

To comment, send e-mails to: kindred@golfdigest.com

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