

SPECIAL REPORT: JOE CARTER CLASSIC



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

Host Joe Carter drives off the first tee at the Celebrity Skins Game on Wednesday at Eagles Nest Golf Club in Maple, Ont.

Still going strong, nine years on

The fundraiser's success motivates Toronto baseball legend Joe Carter to set higher goals to positively impact lives

LIZ BRUCKNER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's not every star-studded fundraising tournament that can repeatedly build on its achievements year after year, but it's a feat the Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament continues to pull off, even nine years post-inception.

Ranked as the top celebrity golf event in North America, the itinerary has included a celebrity skins golf game and a golf tournament at Eagles Nest Golf Club in Maple, Ont., and an exclusive after-party in Toronto, and this year, to coincide with the 25th anniversary of Carter's epic game-winning home run that earned the Blue Jays the 1992/93 World Series win, there was also a Jays game on June 19.

The game reunited Carter with a host of his former teammates and sports celebrities, among them: Roger Clemens, Ed Sprague, and Mitch Williams of the Philadelphia Phillies, who threw Carter's series-winning pitch.

"The three-day event (June 19-21 this year) itself has be-

come a staple in a lot of people's calendars, and every year there's a host of well-known personalities and sponsors who want to be part of it," says James Dodds, co-chairman of the Joe Carter Classic and a TD Bank Group vice-president.

"From my perspective, it's incredible to know that after nine years, the momentum behind this event is continually mounting. There's constant interest from recognizable current and former athletes, musicians, actors and comedians, not only because it's a great cause with a wonderful team of volunteers working behind the scenes to make it seamless, but also because of the person championing it," Dodds says. "The bottom line is, Joe Carter is a great man and when he's part of something like this, people want to get involved and offer their support."

It's this involvement and support from many sponsors and donors that has done much to benefit needy families living in and around the GTA since the Joe Carter Classic began in 2010.

To date, much of the more than \$2.5 million raised has helped high-risk youth, families in financial and emotional need, children living in foster care, funded 15 scholarships for deserving students who could not have otherwise afforded to pursue post-secondary education, and the list goes on.

According to Valerie McMurry, president and CEO of the Children's Aid Foundation, which is the principal recipient of the funds raised by the tournament, beyond the daily benefits the money raised has brought to the lives of the thousands of recipients, the continual awareness Carter brings to some of the most neglected, abused and vulnerable youth in Canada has been invaluable.

"What Joe has done is incredible, and I can't say enough about how this foundation has shined a light on an almost invisible cause while also helping to make an impact on so many people in the process," she says. "It's truly amazing to see someone who has never had a helping hand in their life be completely moved by the generosity

and kindness of strangers, and to witness how that act changes the way they view the world."

As for Carter, he says it's the privilege of giving back that motivates him to set higher fundraising goals year after year.

"My initial goal in starting this was to impact lives in a community I love, and, in particular, the lives of kids who need it most. Seeing the success of this fundraiser over the years has been amazing, and while we purposely don't mess with the structure of the event — we've found a formula that works so there's no need to alter it — there's always the aim to maximize our ability to raise more money than the year before." When that happens, he says, it presents a great opportunity to be able to help deserving young men and women further themselves and succeed in whatever they're pursuing.

"I believe it's important that they know we're in their corner, and that they're encouraged to believe in themselves. Sometimes it's outside encouragement that makes the difference."

Sheehan is up for another round

NINA DRAGICEVIC
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Kelly Sheehan golfs with ex-athletes a lot.

As the director of golf sales for Casa de Campo Resort & Villas in the Dominican Republic, she gives lessons, hosts groups, and attends charity functions year-round. And many former sports stars — having found fame on turf, courts and ice rinks — end up cruising through their retirements on golf courses.

So, of all the sports, which aging athletes make the best golfers?

"I've taught a lot of ex-athletes over the years — I'd say baseball players, they're usually the best in the game," Sheehan says. "Football players, what I've found with them is, they had a mentality of always winning before. Golf is a tough sport for them because they were so perfect at what they did before — and golf is up and down."

There are, however, non-baseball exceptions: "But you look at a guy like (basketball player) Steph Curry, he's probably one of the best golf athletes we have out there."

Sheehan, a PGA and LPGA professional, already has one Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament under her belt, returning this summer after her first stint last year. She says it was an easy decision to come back.

"I play in a lot of these celebrity events, for networking and for my position with Casa de Campo," Sheehan says. "And I'll tell you what, I heard a lot about Joe's event — it being one of the best — and it really was."

Since launching in 2010, the Joe Carter Classic has brought together a wildly eclectic group of golfers and supporters: from Charles Barkley to Wayne Gretzky, Trish Stratus to Charlie Sheen, Snoop Dogg to John Legend.

After such a successful run in 2017, Sheehan says Casa de Campo has decided to return as a sponsor and donate a four-night hotel stay to every participant this year.

"Going into the tournament, I didn't know much about (the charity)," she says, "and then to learn that they have raised \$2.5 million to date for the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada ... That's pretty top-notch of Joe to step up to the plate — no pun intended there — and really take care of the foundation."

Her profile on the Joe Carter Classic website is quick to state the obvious: Sheehan has been recognized as one of the most beautiful women in golf. So, with that title to her name, who would she choose as the most beautiful male golfer?

"That's a tough one, there's so many," she says and laughs. "This is one I'd lose sleep over because I know a lot of the tour players and they'd be after me if I didn't say their name."

Finally, after a lengthy pause, she decides: Mr. Scott is hot. "Everybody loves Adam Scott. I would say most people would say Adam Scott. I think all of America and Canada would agree with me on that one."

Fuhr won't shut out charity tournament

RACHEL NAUD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Grant Fuhr might be a five-time Stanley Cup winner and a seven-time All-Star but, as far as he is concerned, Joe Carter and his charity event is worthy of the brightest spotlight.

The former hockey goaltender, best known for his career with the Edmonton Oilers, has participated in the Joe Carter Classic at least four or five times and planned his return this year.

"It's always a great event," says Fuhr. "And it's always fun to come back to Toronto."

This year marks the 9th annual Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament, which pairs avid golfers with celebrities from the sports and entertainment worlds. All proceeds from the tournament go to help kids in need. In fact, since its inception in 2010, the event has raised \$2.5 million, which benefits the Children's

Aid Foundation of Canada, as well as other children's charities. Fuhr says, in the past, the event has seen him golf with corporate executives from well-known brands including Nike and Air Canada.

"You never know who you are going to be paired up with," says Fuhr. "That's part of the fun. You get to meet new people."

He also says the event has awarded him the opportunity to meet other athletes that he, too, admires and wouldn't have had the chance to meet otherwise.

"I have met guys that I have watched on TV, like (basketball stars) Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley and other elite athletes," says Fuhr. "And, thanks to the event, these people have turned into my friends. I've been pretty lucky."

While Fuhr says he has the time of his life every time he attends the Joe Carter Classic,



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

"It's always a great event," former hockey goaltender Grant Fuhr says. "And it's always fun to come back to Toronto."

he says the best part about participating is helping the kids.

"Education is very important," he says. "Participating in sports is also important. It steers youth in the right direction. I think growing up, you learn values from sport. You learn teamwork. You learn to respect your opponents," he says. "Anytime you can help give back and have fun, it's worth coming back."

But just because the event is for charity, doesn't mean Fuhr isn't prepared to bring his best game. In anticipation of the tournament, Fuhr says he's been playing some golf in Palm

Desert, Calif.

"Hockey and golf are similar," he says. "As a goalie, you have to concentrate for hours. The hand-eye co-ordination in both sports is pretty similar."

Other than that, Fuhr says he's been keeping busy attending other charity events and, in the winter, he works as director of a golf course in California.

Even with his busy schedule, he says he'll always make time for the Joe Carter Classic and would encourage other athletes to do the same.

"I was lucky enough to play a game for a living and it's an honour to be able to give back."



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

PGA and LPGA pro Kelly Sheehan already has one Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament under her belt.

SPECIAL REPORT: JOE CARTER CLASSIC

Duthie: a force on the course

TV broadcaster wants to support charities — and have some fun, too

NINA DRAGICEVIC
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

James Duthie, TSN broadcaster and all-around sports jester, is a dangerous man on the golf course.

His 2011 collection of humorous columns, *The Day I (Almost) Killed Two Gretzkys*, takes its title from his marquee anecdote — the time his golf club nearly became an instrument of death for the hockey legend (Wayne) and his father (Walter).

Duthie had been taking part in a practice session before a tournament at Blue Mountain Golf and Country Club in Collingwood, Ont. “First, I almost hit Wayne in the head,” he says.

“And then two holes later, Walter disappeared — Walter spends the entire day looking for golf balls — and right as I was in my backswing, his head pops out of this meadow, like a fox.

“And it was about 15 yards in front of me. So that was the day I almost killed two Gretzkys.”

But had he succeeded in felling the first Gretzky, isn't it likely the game would have stopped — and he wouldn't have had a shot at the second? He laughs.

“So the day I almost killed two Gretzkys — separately,” he says. “I wouldn't have killed them both.”

Duthie has returned to the Joe Carter Classic Golf Tourna-



AARON HARRIS/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

James Duthie, second from left, relishes an opportunity to support the Children's Aid Foundation.

ment this month. He joined the fundraising event for the first time last year and admits he's generally more careful these days. Still, if you see the lean, grinning sportscaster behind you, a little extra vigilance wouldn't hurt.

“I was going to say I avoid playing behind anybody famous, but that's kind of hard at the Joe Carter tournament,” he says. “Maybe you could send out a little all-caps warning message at the end of this piece.”

Duthie relishes an opportunity to support a group such as the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada. The TV personality is already a volunteer ambassador for the Christian Children's

Fund of Canada, and has supported other causes for kids in the past.

Of all the foundations out there — from the environment to animal rights, and from politics to justice issues — it seems many athletes have a fondness for children's charities in particular. Asked about this, Duthie points out that a lot of athletes, post-career, start families and have young children in their lives.

But beyond that, perhaps sports stars identify with their young fans. Sports, much like childhood, is filled with big dreams and magical moments.

“I think we are all big kids,” he says. “I can certainly say that

from the broadcaster point of view, you never really grow up in the sports world. Whether you're playing it or whether you're covering it.

“There's always that little boy or little girl in you that's out there dreaming ... It's kind of like this Peter Pan world in which you never grow up.”

As for his own dreams, what would Duthie's ideal golf foursome look like? If he could pick any famous teammates, past or present?

“Give me Muhammad Ali, give me Martin Luther King, and then — for laughs — give me Rod Black,” he says, “the most fascinating man alive — and the host of this tournament.”

McMahon is all about helping the kids

NINA DRAGICEVIC
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's a Toronto-area event, so obviously an Arizonan is going to mention the weather first.

“I remember that first day was not good weather last year — I was freezing my butt off,” football legend Jim McMahon says, gruff-voiced but teasing. He's talking about his second stint at the Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament, the celebrity-studded charitable event that has been taking place at the Eagles Nest Golf Club in Maple, Ont., every summer since 2010.

But the former Chicago Bears quarterback is quick to empathize: “Toronto gets the same kind of weather Chicago does, so I guess I'm kind of used to that.”

McMahon moved from Chicago to Scottsdale, Ariz., in 2010, but still hops around the U.S. and Canada in the summer, attending various golf and charity events. It is, in fact, how he met Joe Carter and got involved in his tournament.

“I met Joe over the years, I'd be at different charity events, and we'd try to help each other out,” he says. “Everybody pretty much has their own charities, and we try to support each other's charities when we can.”

“It doesn't take much for me to get on a plane and meet a group of people, play golf and have a good time — and they can raise a lot of money and do great work in their communities.”

McMahon enjoys the fundraising golf circuit — “I seem to always get paired up with the beer people” — and lends his star power out freely, with a soft spot for children's causes and foundations that help veterans and their families.

The Joe Carter Classic raises money for the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, benefiting children and youth in care. It's a vulnerable population that faces many challenges: neglect, abandonment, even homelessness.

McMahon is no stranger to life's highs and lows — from championship glory to legal trouble, Super Bowl rings to early onset dementia — and he hopes these children can find a good place for themselves in the world.

“I know (these kids) had some tough times in their lives, but that doesn't mean that they're hopeless,” he says. “There's a lot of life ahead, so they have to make their own decisions, (about) what direction they want to go.”

“Be who you want to be, not who people expect you to be.”

Recently, McMahon has been publicly vocal in his support of medicinal marijuana, part of his own treatment for ailments following a career in a physically punishing sport.

When he hears that Canada is legalizing cannabis this summer, his voice lights up — but the golf tournament is landing before legalization takes effect.

“I'll definitely be back when it's legal,” he says. “We've been lied to over 100 years about this plant, it's about time people wake up and stop believing all the crap that they heard about it.”

So he'll be back. And he has time for one last dig.

“I look forward to coming to Toronto and seeing some good friends, and hopefully the weather will be really nice this year — nice and warm.”



Jim McMahon enjoys the fundraising golf circuit.

Charity makes up a big part of Allen

Former quarterback feels sense of responsibility to give back to community

RACHEL NAUD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Damon Allen has scored his share of touchdowns as a former professional quarterback and all-time leading passer. Yet, for him, participating in the Joe Carter Classic is what gives the CFL star major points in a personal way.

“Participating in the Joe Carter Classic gives you the potential to change people's lives for the better,” says Allen, who played for the Toronto Argonauts from 2003-2007. “It's neat to see so many people come together and make a difference in someone's life. That's the most important. Everything else is a stage to just have fun.” This year will mark Allen's eighth year participating in the event that benefits the education and development of Canadian youth through the Joe Carter Scholarship Fund and

the Joe Carter Family Support Fund.

“My parents taught me to give back to community,” he says. “I have known Joe for a long time and he has such a big heart. Plus, I love the game of golf and when you combine that with Joe's personality, I will always support him.”

Allen is no stranger to charity. He also hosts two other tournaments himself — one in Edmonton to help those with autism and one in Toronto that supports moms suffering from post-partum depression.

What's also integral, to his golf game anyway, is his understanding of weight transfer — a skill he has perfected during his life as a quarterback.

“I have a great feel for it,” he says. “Most quarterbacks are good golfers.”

In addition to perfecting his swing, Allen has also been busy preparing the next generation of players at his Quarterback Academy and telling his own story in a book he's writing with his brother.



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Former CFL quarterback Damon Allen is no stranger to charity — he hosts two other tournaments himself.

“I try to control my own destiny,” he says. “That's just working hard and being involved in things that put a smile on my face and bring peace and joy to me.”

That includes being involved in the Joe Carter Classic. “It's one of the best celebrity tournaments there is in Canada,” Allen says. “You get to see and revisit guys you have met before and we come from all walks of sport. It's still competitive but fun. The fact that it's for a great cause just makes it better.”

Allen says, as a professional athlete, he feels a sense of responsibility to give back whenever he can.

“You have to have purpose in life,” he says. “I am not supposed to just be playing football.

But football, and with what I was able to do with the sport, has awarded me the chance to impact people's lives. That's the biggest accomplishment. Charity is a big component of who I am.”

He says helping out and giving back is a valuable lesson he learned growing up, and he recognizes that everyone's lives are different.

“At the end of the day, it's about impacting people that may not have the resources,” he says. “Nobody's story is going to be the same. If you can help someone along the way, why not be involved? For me, it's not about collecting awards and materials, it's about the true impact of giving of time and services.”

Clemens believes it's important to help

RACHEL NAUD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When it comes to the Joe Carter Classic, star pitcher Roger Clemens says Carter — also a former professional baseball player — hits it out of the park, every time. Known as “The Rocket” for his 24 seasons pitching in the Major Baseball League, Clemens says he's in awe of what Carter does for Toronto and children in need.

“There are so many guys that give back to the community and what Joe does for Toronto is incredible,” says Clemens. “Joe has been able to support and keep this event growing for nine years. He's a huge recognizable force in Toronto. I think we're all looking forward to having fun and helping him continue his legacy for charity.”

Clemens will be among the athletes participating in the 9th annual Joe Carter Classic Golf Tournament that sees sponsors pair up with professional athletes and other celebrities in a game of golf. Proceeds from the

event go toward supporting the education and development of Canadian youth through the Joe Carter Scholarship Fund and the Joe Carter Family Support Fund. Clemens is a first-timer at the event and says what drew him to participate was the mix of doing good while playing a sport he loves.

“It's a great way to get together and enjoy the game of golf,” he says. “When you spend four hours on a course with different people, from fundraisers to athletes, it's a great deal of fun. You get to meet cool people and get more personal with them. And they get to see you out of uniform.”

Still, despite the thrill some sponsors might get from swinging some clubs with their favourite celebrities, Clemens says the real heroes of the event are the ones funding the charities.

“As athletes, we get to get out there and be in the forefront. To me, the paying customers — the big sponsors that get behind event — are the heroes. They

take the time to lend a hand and write a big cheque for children and charity.”

In anticipation for the big game, Clemens admits he's been hitting a few balls for practise.

“If they let me throw a couple, I'll be really good at it,” he says and laughs.

While Clemens says his baseball skills might not translate onto the golf course, he says spectators and participants alike can expect a good game.

“All athletes have a competitive nature and you'll be able to see that,” says Clemens. “It will translate into some really great golf.”

Another event Clemens is looking forward to is seeing his son, Kody, play for the Detroit Tigers. His other son, Kacy, also plays for the Toronto Blue Jays. And while Clemens says he is absolutely a proud papa, witnessing his sons following his footsteps, he is just, if even more proud, of their other accomplishments.



Former pitcher Roger Clemens is in awe of what Joe Carter does for children in need.

“They have worked really hard to work on their skills,” he says. “What I'm really proud of is the fact that Kacy just graduated from business school and Cody will graduate from communications school. It's not an easy thing to do, while taking on a professional career in baseball.”

And, when they reach the level of their 11-time All-Star father, Clemens hopes they'll also follow in his footsteps when it comes to charitable giving.

“As a public figure, I think you have to do it,” he says. “At some point, it's important to give back.”

PROFILES

MEET THIS YEAR'S JOE CARTER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

"We are very fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers, sponsors, celebrities and participants who take part in the tournament year after year and are committed to giving children in need an opportunity for a better life ahead."

JAMES DODDS
CO-CHAIRMAN OF
THE JOE CARTER CLASSIC

Ashley Ash, Suzie Brooks and Jada Kinnaird have a couple of things in common. They've survived challenging childhoods with career aspirations, and now they're recipients of a Joe Carter Scholarship to help them achieve their goals. Funded by proceeds from the Joe Carter Classic, the scholarship enables youths who are transitioning out of the child-care system to pursue a post-secondary education. Read these three young women's stories here, by **Rick McGinnis**.



RICK MCGINNIS PHOTOS/FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Ashley Ash will work as an intern at a legal aid clinic this fall.

'No One's Girl' advocating for children

Four years ago, when Ashley Ash heard she'd won the Hilary Weston Writers Trust award for "No One's Girl," an autobiographical essay she'd written for a high school English class, the first thing she did was run from her math class to her creative writing teacher's office.

"I didn't have to say a word. He saw it on my face," she recalls.

The essay, which was later published in *Maclean's* magazine, told her story — born in the slums of Amritsar, India, adopted by a Canadian family, a troubled adoptive mother, stays in foster homes, suicidal thoughts, then a third family and something like a happy ending.

It was a pivotal moment in Ashley's life. "It was validation that I had a way of writing that spoke to people and that touched something in other people, and a lot of people reached out to me and said it really impacted the way they saw young people in care and that they're looking at adopting or fostering. And that's huge as writers — we want to be able to connect with other people."

Since moving on to study law, Ashley, now 21, was surprised to discover that she wanted to practise as a child care advocate, in the same system she thought she wanted to escape.

"I wanted to remove myself from the system and from social work, and it just kind of happened as a fluke when I was in my first year and I realized that I actually could provide a good viewpoint, from having lived experience. I actually could see myself in this profession; I could be that social worker that I wish I'd had growing up."

With an internship at a legal aid clinic for kids set for the fall, Ashley has had time to think about the role she can play for kids such as herself, in a child-care system she recalls as often confusing.

"The worst thing is that there's a lot of transiency, a lot of instability in your life, and a lot of young people have multiple moves in one year. You're changing your address, your school, your friends. It's huge."

"You don't know why you're moving, you don't know where you're going. You're confused about what's going on, and in my experience a lot of people didn't tell me what was going on. I do a lot of advocacy work now and that's one of my hugest issues. My thing is 'Nothing about me without me.' You can't say anything or talk about me without me there."

Looking back, though, she says that her time spent in care helped her find a strength she says she shares with other kids like her.

"A lot of people don't realize that young people in care are so smart. We are so intelligent because we have to be — there is no room for failure because you have to do well, you have to be the best you can be. We're very smart socially and emotionally, because you just learn those skills early on, you learn to grow up very quickly, so a lot of us are mature in a lot of ways at a very young age."



Suzie Brooks does muay thai and jiu jitsu to help maintain her mental health.

Fanning the spark to build things

Four years ago, admits Suzie Brooks, she skipped school to watch a movie being filmed in her hometown. The old market square in Kingston, Ont., had been transformed into 19th-century Buffalo, N.Y., and Suzie took in every detail, fascinated.

"They'd turned our whole market square into this 1800s market with dirt on the ground, no more roads, old wooden stands and green screens everywhere and I thought it was amazing that they could do that, and make our modern market square look like it was in the 1800s."

It lit a spark that she was able to explore in class. "I took a film program in my final year of high school and learned about green screens and editing and setting up film sets and thought it was so much fun. I'd also taken a theatre program where we built our own set, and part of me wanted to be on both sides, even though I was performing."

At school, her favourite class was English, and her ambitions literary. She decided she wanted to try to tell the story of her life, much of it spent in group homes in the child-care system and quite a bit different from that of her friends — "from couch surfing at friends' houses at 13 to meeting my biological father at 18. I think some of these things might entertain people but they also might help people."

Suzie, now 21, was also diagnosed in high school with borderline personality disorder, which she learned to cope with at the gym. "I started to go to the gym regularly, and I joined a jiu jitsu class and I started doing muay thai and I found that it actually helps you. Especially with borderline personality disorder, if you're ever feeling in an instant that you're just sad or mad, right away you just go to the gym and use that energy and convert it into something that will help your mental health, and that's really been helpful."

It was only later, while studying English, that she rediscovered her interest in building things, which began when she was little. "I never had a dresser, so I would build a makeshift dresser out of cardboard and tape, which was always a lot of fun."

Later experience helping renovate a basement to make bedrooms for her and her sister — "It was a lot of fun" — gave her more experience with building and furniture making. She shifted her focus at school from English to carpentry, and ultimately wants to work building sets for theatre, TV and movies.

"I thought I could probably do this, and I could do it well, and I could create furniture and use it to build movie or play sets. I've always wanted to be part of the entertainment industry, and I think maybe the best way of getting my foot in the door is working with the crew. Building sets is one of those ways I could help create this image I have in my head, or I could help create someone else's vision."



Jada Kinnaird says growing up in the child-care system has given her a unique skill set.

'I could do more than was expected'

Jada Kinnaird's goal of a career in law enforcement begins with what would, for many people, be a painful memory. "When they take kids away from their parents they have to bring police officers in. And when I was being taken away from my parents — which wasn't a very fun experience — I had this big, brutish man pull me away."

"And I'm sure he was a lovely man, but I think that this was a situation where someone more nurturing — a man or a woman — would have been a lot more helpful, to make that traumatic experience not so traumatic for me. Being thrown in the back of a car as a kid by some big dude is not very comforting, so I think the fact that I'm too nice would give me a unique skill set in dealing with sensitive issues."

Growing up in the child-care system, Jada talks about the time spent at Variety Village as being like a second home. She began going there when she was 9 with her synchronized swimming team, and went back years later to work as a volunteer.

"I was just inspired by all the people there," says Jada, now 20. "It's all the people in society who people don't have very high expectations of, doing incredible things. One lady, she was a double amputee and she was doing triathlons. I would walk through this building and these people were doing way more than was expected of them, and I thought since I was born with a disadvantage I could do way more than was expected of me, as well. So I found my home there."

Jada remembers her synchronized swim team as a lifeline during a troubled time. "It gives you so much confidence because you're accomplishing something. After school you go to practice and you know that whatever sport you're in, you're better, faster, more flexible. It was something I could accomplish and feel really good about myself."

"It's also really important for young girls who, in their teens, tend to drop out of sports, to keep themselves in it because it teaches them discipline. I became a better student because of it — I couldn't procrastinate because I didn't have the time."

Most important of all, she says, is the sense of community she had on her swim team, and the refuge it gave her as a youth in care.

"There's nothing more important to a youth in care than a support system of individuals who care about him or her, because some people aren't lucky enough to get that right off the bat."

A community, Jada adds, is "where you get all the warm and fuzzies, for lack of better words — the stuff you go to bed at night thinking about."

"It's what helps you build yourself as an individual, that there are people you can live a life with. It's not just a system, like where you visit a lawyer or a social worker. A community gives you memories."



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 - NEW YORK
 - AXA
 - SummerSkates
 - BARBECUE
 - VPAR
 - CASA de CAMPO
 - strellson
 - DMS DEELUX
- Partners**
 - DFI
 - GOLF Client Services
 - FAMOUS FOLKS
 - rock-it promotions
 - BASSETT EVENTS INC.
 - FROZEN POOL