

Dakoda Dowd's dream

The courageous story of Dakoda Dowd

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WHEN the Academy Awards engage in their annual celebration of filmmaking, they also remind us of how casually we have come to regard the truth. A second thought is rarely given to the work that embellishes reality in the pursuit of art. That's just the way it is done. Two special stories are walking among us right now that will surely end up on the big screen, and as they are translated from reality to film some truth will be lost, and some fiction will be added. That need not be the case. They are stories that stand on their own and simply need to be told.

Last month, a young man with autism named Jason McElwain reduced a nation of cynical sports fans to tears when he played his only high school basketball game and scored 20 points in a magical four-minute sequence. It is hoped that when Jason's life is transferred to film, it is a documentary in which he and those touched by him are allowed to tell their own stories. Nothing more need be said. No footage need be created other than what really happened.

And then there is the case of Dakoda Dowd (pictured), who next month will make her LPGA debut in the Ginn Clubs & Resort Open on a sponsor's exemption just weeks past her 13th birthday. Too often in sports we hear words like "courage" and "heroic" tossed around carelessly, as if a golf shot could have an impact beyond the game.

Truly, our greatest opportunities to be courageous occur in our own lives, exactly where it matters most. Dakoda will be playing for her mother, Kelly Jo, whose body is ravaged by the pain of a cancer that has spread from her breasts to her liver and bones. Kelly Jo's dream is to see Dakoda play in an LPGA event, and that dream now is set against a clock seemingly beyond human control.

"It is the right thing to do," Bobby Ginn, president and CEO of Ginn Clubs & Resorts, told Golf World about the exemption he granted to Dakoda. "Our company is about family, and we got involved in golf because it is a family sport. To give Dakoda a chance to present this gift to her mother makes our sponsorship of the event already a success." While it is unlikely anyone would oppose the exemption given to Dakoda, Ginn has added an extra spot to the field of the April 27-30 event so no LPGA player is bumped by her presence.

The plot line of this story is simple. At the age of 4, Dakoda was introduced to golf by her father, Mike. Shortly after Dakoda's ninth birthday, Kelly Jo had a double mastectomy. There was every reason to think the cancer was cured. Then last May something didn't feel right. After many tests it was determined the cancer had returned -- and spread. Left untreated, Kelly Jo would have less than a year to live. But Kelly Jo fights on, through radiation and chemotherapy, taking medication to ease one of the most painful of all cancers, and keeping an eye trained on the calendar and the day when she will see Dakoda tee it up against the pros.

If this is a race against time, it is also a reminder that time is constantly slipping through our fingers and that life should be lived with a passion and purpose that celebrates the gift it is. Courageous acts are rarely decisions, but rather reactions to events beyond our control, the hand dealt to us by life. Next month, Kelly Jo and Dakoda will share a private act of love on a public stage. We are fortunate we get to watch. And no shred of truth need be embellished to make this an award-winning story.