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COACH HEP CANCER CHALLENGE

First-time fundraiser adds to Hep's legacy

By Mercedes Rodriguez
May 11, 2008

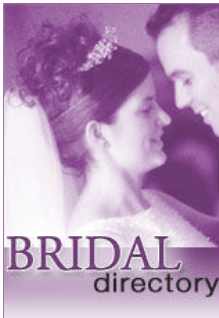
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The sun came out in honor of Coach Hep Saturday. After days of hiding, it broke free of the clouds just in time for the first-ever Coach Hep Cancer Challenge at Armstrong Stadium on the Indiana University campus.

The challenge included a 2K family walk, a 5K run, a 40K and a 100K bicycle ride and a combined running and biking event. The participants were treated to a beautiful morning. "We were here at 5:30 a.m. when it was still dark and foggy and cold. To see it now in the bright sunlight is incredible," said Jane Hoepfner, who was on hand throughout the event.

According to Brenda Davis, an event organizer, about 425 people preregistered for the challenge.

Coach Terry Hoepfner was not far from the minds of those there. Two of the trophies for the 5K run were small replicas of The Rock, others were smooth stones with inscriptions on them.

"It's a great cause. We thought a lot of Coach Hep," said Robert Russell, who was there to run the 5K with his wife, Cheryl.

Funds raised will go to the IU Simon Cancer Center and the Olcott Center for Cancer Education.

"I felt very honored that they wanted to put Coach's name with something so worthwhile," said Hoepfner.

IU football players and women's basketball players were on hand to help with the festivities. Kicker Austin Starr was seen on the bicycle track's infield, playfully running with a football while being chased by a gaggle of small children.

The challenge was the brainchild of Dr. Rick Schilling. After watching people close to him battle cancer and after the death of Coach Hoepfner, he said, he decided to organize a fundraiser for cancer research. He expressed gratitude for Jane Hoepfner's help in organizing the challenge. "She was fabulous from the very beginning."

Schilling said a date has already been set for next year's Coach Hep Cancer Challenge — May 16, 2009.

As the time approached for the family walk, the track began to fill with strollers and little ones. Miss Indiana University, Gabrielle Lee Reed, was spotted. People put on their red shoelace, given to participants to symbolize how we are all tied together in the fight against cancer.

Patricia Brant was there with her 7-year-old daughter, Lily, and her 9-year-old daughter, Sophie.

It was her first time participating in any sort of organized run or walk, but "we wouldn't be anywhere else but here," she said. Brant was there for her dear friend, Allison, who is Coach Hep's daughter.

Brant was a little misty-eyed that morning. She said Lily had been saving money to set up a savings account, but when the child was told about the cancer challenge, she gave \$15 to enter the walk. "She said, 'Mom, I'm trying to save for my savings account, but this is more important.'"

By the end of the day's events, 709 people had taken the time to run, bike or walk for the Coach Hep Cancer Challenge, Schilling said.

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Jane Hoepfner touches the Rock, a symbol of her late husband's influence on the IU football program, as the lines of walkers and runners participating in the Coach Hep Cancer Challenge pass through Memorial Stadium Saturday morning. Monty Howell | Herald-Times
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