

MT KILIMANJARO MARCH 9, 2023

Climbing the highest free-standing mountain in the world to highlight the need for living organ donation and to demonstrate what is possible after donation



BOBBY Mc LAUGHLIN

NON-DIRECTED KIDNEY DONOR

Soccer coach, Collegiate athlete, outdoor enthusiast, advocacy leader by chance and disposition, lives in Seattle

“More patience, more kindness, more compassion.”

Movement, sports, and the outdoors weave themselves through every aspect of my life: soccer in college, an adult career as a coach, playing ball for hours with my brother and kids, hiking for fitness and as meditation through life's sweet and difficult eras, and pretty much every other physical endeavor or game one can think of. For physical health, absolutely, but also as a way to connect with others and connect to a sense of peace and tranquility. I went into a post biking accident surgery with worries about whether I'd be able to golf or throw a baseball with my son....and I came out of it with Dave's bone and tissue a permanent part of my wrist reconstruction. Dave's selfless end of life gift opened my eyes to the gifts of donation and would mold my life's next direction. His and his family's gift of tissue and bone had given me the ability to continue my life long passion for movement, but even more, it made me realize what amazingly positive ripples can emanate from the act of donation. The dominoes continued to line up, my mother received bone marrow and blood donations as part of her cancer treatment. I met a woman who had donated her kidney and then the clincher, I met her recipient. Hearing her recipient describe what the kidney donation meant to her and all those she loved, I knew immediately it was something I had to do. I became a non directed kidney donor in 2019 and returned to my beloved mountains just weeks following surgery.

My career as a coach has always been about so much more than just skill and the game. It's been about the entire journey, of the player growing into their best selves, of the connections between team members, of bringing positivity and grace to the game, the community and our daily lives. I immediately knew my donation would, likewise, be about more than the health and life benefits to the circle of lives connected to my recipient. I just didn't know what that "more" would be. One connection led to another, people and organizations glided into my world, until one day I found myself volunteering and coordinating living donation advocacy climbs up Kilimanjaro. I am so inspired by people who do good in the world. All kinds of good. And I'd like to keep paying Dave's gift forward.

As part of our 2023 Kilimanjaro climb, many of our team of 35 decided we would like to take our advocacy one step further. Not only would we climb the world's highest free standing mountain to show what's possible post kidney donation, but we would also "adopt" someone in need of a kidney. Take them on the journey with us. Breathe hope into their world, share their personal story, maybe even find the soul willing to give them a kidney. And so entered Ed. A man whose story I found by chance, passed on through one of my many kidney connections.

A man who has used his life for good. The perfect person to join me on my journey. But let me step back in time a moment.

As a 12 year old, bright eyed baseball fan, I caught a homerun ball hit by NY Mets player Lee Mazzilli in the 1979 MLB ALL-STAR game. It was a wonderful outing with my dad, but so much more than that one day...childhood "made-up" baseball games with my brother in our tiny Seattle bedroom, hours and years with my son (and sometimes my daughter) as we tossed a baseball in the backyard, baseball playoff games celebrating my 23 year old as he completes his tour of duty as a US Marine. Given how much all aspects of sports have meant to me, I've held onto that 1979 ball through decades of moves and a major downsize, thinking one day I might return it to it's rightful "owner", the man who hit that homerun. As I sat last fall in the same location of that 1979 game, talking with my son about sitting in the stands for the 2023 ALL-STAR game, and filling him in on our kidney donation advocacy efforts, I realized this story had come full circle. You see, Ed is Ed Hearn. NY Mets 1986 World Series winning Ed Hearn. He isn't the man who hit the ball to little Bobby McLaughlin (he was in his second year of the minor leagues working his way up to the Bigs), but he is a lifelong member of the Mets family. He has spent his life after baseball, doing good in the world, despite chronic, sometimes debilitating health issues. He is the kind of man I am proud to share the journey with. He is a motivational speaker, inspirational book writer, one who lives his gratitude, and is, by the way, funny! Maybe he will even hand that 1979 ball over to NY Mets family member Lee Mazzilli one of these days. I know I will be handing Ed my support and my deep hopes that someone, somewhere, will hear our stories and feel the gift of donation is something they too need to do.

I was recently interviewed for a podcast to discuss my non-directed kidney donation and our advocacy efforts on Kilimanjaro. The interviewer asked me "If you could have everyone do one thing differently, tomorrow, that's going to make the world a better place, what would it be?" My answer...my hope: More patience, more kindness, more compassion. You don't have to donate a kidney to make the world a better place, it can be so much simpler than that...but if you do decide to donate, those ripples can reach far and wide.

To find out more contact Bobby McLaughlin at behopesview@gmail.com.



Saving lives together

