

McCaffery, Hoiberg team with Vitale in fight versus cancer

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

RIVERSIDE, Iowa – In the world of college basketball, there might not be a bigger advocate than Dick Vitale. His passion for the game oozes on ESPN every season and any compliments he gives toward either the Iowa or Iowa State basketball programs don't go unnoticed throughout the state.

In the fight against cancer, there might not be a bigger advocate than Dick Vitale. Every year, he holds a gala in Sarasota, Fla., that gets people from all over the globe to donate money towards cancer research. Ask him about a family with a child fighting cancer and that same passion he shows towards college basketball is on display. In fact, it's even more genuine.

Vitale's crusade brought him back to Iowa for the second year in a row for a two-day fundraiser at Riverside Casino and Golf Resort sponsored by both his Dickie V Foundation and the 380 Foundation. It consisted of a gala held Friday evening, followed by a day of golf Saturday afternoon at the Blue Top Ridge Golf Course.

"To my last breath, my last breath, I'm going to beg and I'm going to plead with people to give us money for kids battling cancer," Vitale said.

The growth in this annual event was more evident than ever before. Just like last year, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery partook in this event again like he does numerous fundraisers with a similar cause. This time around though, he participated after seeing cancer strike his family last spring when his 14-

year-old son Patrick had surgery to remove a malignant tumor from his thyroid.

Patrick was among the kids recognized by Vitale during the gala Friday evening and Fran McCaffery called it, "one of the best days of his life," when he and his family recently learned that Patrick's second scan was clear.

"For me, the support for Patrick has been overwhelming throughout the entire state," McCaffery said. "Those who had cancer and all different people from Iowa State, Northern Iowa, Drake and obviously all the different teams at Iowa. From [former wrestler] Tony Ramos, to the women's basketball team, to what Josh Oglesby did, the baseball team, we'll never forget.

"It really made a difference for our family as we battled these last few months."

Another difference with this year's event was McCaffery wasn't the only Division-I coach in the state on hand. Upon returning home from Greece Friday afternoon, Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg immediately made the trek across state for the gala and was back again Saturday for the golf portion of the fundraiser.

Hoiberg said he felt honored after receiving phone calls from both Vitale and McCaffery in the spring asking to be part of the event. He also mentioned how he knows firsthand as a heart disease survivor how fundraisers like Vitale's can have a heavy influence.

"It's amazing to see the passion he has for this," Hoiberg said of Vitale. "To see him get up and walk around the room with his wireless mic and he's sweating all over the place, it just speaks to who he is.

"To be a small part of that, it really is an honor."

Both coaches mentioned attending Vitale's gala in the past. McCaffery and his wife Margaret were both in Sarasota last month for this year's gala, which Vitale said raised \$2.1 million for pediatric cancer research.

"I'm amazed to watch him and the energy level he brings to this fight for the V Foundation," McCaffery said. "I'm just proud to be a part of it."

"To go to a function and raise \$2.1 million in one night is an amazing experience, so any time Dick asks me and Margaret to be anywhere, we're going to be there."

As much honor as both McCaffery and Hoiberg felt being associated with this weekend's event, Vitale was just as appreciative of both coaches helping him in his crusade. He said his respect for McCaffery skyrocketed last March when the latter flew back to Iowa City for Patrick's surgery the morning of Iowa's NCAA Tournament game against Tennessee, then flew back to Dayton afterwards to coach the game.

"The state of Iowa is fortunate that you've got two unbelievable people," Vitale said. "Forget about just coaching, family people. People that you want your child to be around. People that you want the kind of guidance that they're going to give."

"They're quality guys, man. They're helping us here raise some dollars and I love that."

VIDEO: DICK VITALE