

How Golf Bonded Bubba Watson, His Father

The deal was non-negotiable.

A 6-year-old **Bubba Watson** wanted desperately to play golf with his father, Gerry Watson, but his dad already had a standing Saturday foursome with his golf buddies from work.

Can't take little Bubba out with the big boys. He's never even played. And he's only 6.

Bubba's mother, Molly, had something to say about that.

"My mom said the only way you can play on Saturdays is if you take your son," Bubba said.

Gerry stood his ground. "He said 'No, I don't want to take my son,'" Bubba recalls. "I want him to be a baseball player. He doesn't need to play golf. That's dumb for him to play golf."

The argument went nowhere. In a hurry.

"My mom was the boss of the house," Bubba said. "My mom said, 'Then you're not going.'"

Moments later, Gerry was looking for the keys and calling for his son.

"Bubba, get in the car, let's go."

And thus, a legend was born.

'It'll Change Your Whole Life'

Winner of the 2012 Masters in April, Bubba wasn't able to share that moment with his father, a Green Beret lieutenant in Vietnam, who died of throat cancer on Oct. 15, 2010.

That's perhaps one of the reasons why you saw him sobbing

uncontrollably with his mother at Augusta National, mere seconds after winning the Green Jacket.

But Bubba knows his father is now in a better place. Even if he couldn't have always said that. In fact, it was only about two months before Gerry's death that Bubba was certain his father had accepted Christ into his life.

"He knew Angie and I were Christ followers and everything but he wasn't having it," said Bubba, who was paired with Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson and barely missed the cut at the U.S. Open, which wrapped up on Father's Day. "He's read a lot of books on different cultures and religions and I know he knew (about Christianity), but he never went to church."

So, with Gerry's health progressively getting worse, Bubba and his caddy, Teddy Scott, met with PGA Tour chaplain Larry Moody to hatch a plan on evangelizing his ailing father.

The plan was simple yet genius. And Bubba knew that it just might work. Well, he prayed for such a miracle, anyway.

Bubba's father, who had been fighting rheumatoid arthritis for 19 years, was quickly dying of throat cancer, yet he was still able to read.

So Teddy penned as sincere of a hand-written letter to Gerry as he knew how, boldly sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ:

"Your son loves you. He does everything for you. You've made him the man he is today. And he loves Christ more than anything in the world. He would love to see you in Heaven with him."

At the end of the letter was a P.S., that explained exactly how he could have eternal life by praying the following prayer of salvation.

"And it'll change your whole life," Bubba remembers the final line of the letter.

A month passed. Bubba never talked to his dad about the letter. Until one day he called.

"He said 'Hey, you need to start practicing,'" Bubba recalls that pivotal conversation. "It was a couple weeks after I had just won my first golf tournament (The Travelers Championship). I said 'Dad, I am practicing. I just won. I'm trying hard.'"

Gerry cut him off: "When I get to heaven, I'll be so good at golf."

Bubba's heart skipped a beat. Did he just hear what he thought he heard?

"But I tried to play it cool," said Bubba, a committed Christian since 2004. "I acted tough, like it didn't faze me what he had said."

So Bubba responded with humor. "I said, 'Dad, look, heaven's great, but heaven's not going to make you that good where you're better than me.'"

As the conversation unfolded, he realized what had happened with his father and that letter his caddy had sent.

"In my heart, I believe he had to have asked the Lord into his life," Bubba said. "It was very moving. Very touching. The Lord had changed him. Something went on."

"He happened to pass away two months later."

'I'm Basically a Kid at Heart'

Bubba's 155-yard miraculous playoff shot from the Augusta pine straw has been well documented. Everywhere from Letterman to Fox News has broken down Bubba's freakishly innovative ability to will a golf ball, as if he was a puppet Master.

Even overhead diagrams of the "Miracle at the Masters" shot have been passed around the social media world like it was the

Sneezing Panda.

And in turn, Bubba has used his new platform to talk about his love for Jesus through the media and to his 600,000-plus Twitter followers.

But all that fanfare about winning the Green Jacket has taken a backseat in Bubba's world. Not even two weeks prior to that Easter Sunday victory, Bubba and his wife, Angie, adopted one-month old Caleb from South Florida.

Bubba turned to Twitter to break the news on March 28: Everyone #angieb1433 & I are proud new parents of a 1month old baby boy name Caleb. Been a parent for 2 days. #amazing

It was a long road for Bubba and his wife, who had waited four years since starting the adoption process in Florida. Moving to Arizona and his dad's cancer slowed down the process.

Weeks before finding out there was a baby boy that might be theirs, Bubba insisted he was ready for this next step.

"Am I nervous about being a dad? No," he said. "I've been around nephews my whole life. I'm used to kids. I'm basically a kid at heart."

Shortly after the adoption, Bubba took some heat in the golf world for pulling out of the Wells-Fargo Championship in Charlotte, N.C., and the Players Championship in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., on back-to-back May weekends in order to bond with his son.

He took to Twitter again to announce his decision and despite the unfair backlash from the golf community, he's firmly stood by his decision to put his family first, even if his golf game suffered a bit.

"I feel blessed and excited I get to spend quality time with Caleb and Angie in the next few weeks #diaperchange"

"The Players is one of the best weeks of the year but bonding with my son and wife is what it is all about right now. #familytime"

'I Just Followed My Dad'

Bubba's not exactly sure what his parenting style will be, but he does have one tip that any dad can benefit from.

"As long as you have that Bible to lean on, you can always be a good father," the Bagdad, Fla., native said.

And despite not growing up with a Christian father, Bubba was taught some key biblical principals.

"Even though he wasn't a Christian believer," Bubba said of his dad, "his biggest thing growing up was the 10 Commandments.

"I maybe lied twice in my life during middle school. That's one of the biggest things he taught me was not to lie."

But that's far from the only thing Bubba has learned about being a dad.

"I fall back on everything's he's taught me," said Bubba of the man who worked as a maintenance manager at an agriculture biotech company. "We've been molded a certain way because of our parents. The good and the bad.

"Hopefully, as a dad, I'll take all the good points from both my mom and my dad."

And included in some of those "good points" from dad are the countless and distinct memories at the golf course. He still remembers getting his first left-handed club at age 6, a nine-iron from the local pro that his dad cut down to his smaller size.

"I would just walk down the fairway at 6 years old with one club in my hand, hitting it straight up the fairway," he said.

"I just followed my dad.

"My dad drove the cart. Him and his buddies were always in the trees looking for balls."

But he also remembers his father, who so desperately wanted Bubba to fall in love with baseball, become his biggest golf fan.

"He didn't push me into any sport, he just let me be me," Bubba said. "I never had a lesson at golf. He let me learn it myself."

And while golf bonded father and son, there was a lot more that Bubba gleaned from his dad.

"I know I've taken everything I've learned from him and I have it in the back of my mind," Bubba said. "He's one of the best teachers I've ever been around."

As the arthritis worsened and the cancer robbed the final years of Gerry's life, Bubba's relationship was maintained mostly over the phone. But that didn't stop the two from staying close.

"He was always watching, always wanted to know what I was doing in my life," Bubba said. "He was the one guy who always asked me what was going on in my life. I just miss talking to him."

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