

Living is giving: NFL great gives back for CMN

By: Steve Casson, sports editor sports@ccheadliner.com | Posted: Tuesday, July 23, 2013 11:53 am

Roy Lorenzo didn't know his call to a medical clinic company that provides flu shots would lead to a shot at landing an appearance by an NFL great at the 12th Annual Scramble for Miracles golf tournament benefitting Children's Miracle Network hospitals July 22 at Fremont Hills.

As the CFO of the title sponsor for the CMN charity golf tournament for the past eight years, Lorenzo turned a talk with former St. Louis Cardinals offensive lineman Conrad Dobler into a charitable two-year relationship.

"When I called the first time, he answered the phone as Conrad Dobler, and being an old football fan, I recognized the name and asked him if he was 'the' Conrad Dobler," Lorenzo said. "We struck up a conversation from there and have become long-distance friends."

Lorenzo asked for pieces from the NFL lineman's career to auction off. It's Dobler, who is picking up the pieces of his life, who decided to make the delivery in person.

"As this tournament approached, I asked him for memorabilia to auction off," Lorenzo said. "Next thing you know, he's coming down. So this will be a special treat for everyone participating in this year's tournament."

Dubbed "pro football's dirtiest player" in 1977 by Sports Illustrated, Dobler knows a lot about helping other people. He is the primary caregiver for his wife, Joy, who has been a quadriplegic since 2001. In a bizarre accident, she slipped out of a hammock during a Fourth of July backyard gathering falling down a few feet. She landed on her head, breaking her neck.

"Do I wish things were different? Right. Do I wish she wouldn't have gotten in the hammock? Right," Dobler said. "But, we've been blessed. I've become a very good cook, and it's given me a new perspective on single parents."

Talking care of six kids was a handful for the three-time Pro Bowl player. He put all but one through college and had a difficult time breaking the news to his daughter, Holly, that community college



Conrad Dobler

Former NFL lineman Conrad Dobler, who appeared in three Pro Bowls with the St. Louis Cardinals, signs autographs at the Scramble for Miracles golf tournament July 22 at Fremont Hills.

would be the only option.

Dobler was spending so much on caring for his wife, he was going broke. That's when pro golfer Phil Mickelson, who won the British Open July 21, heard about Dobler's situation and offered to help.

"Phil's attorney called and said, 'Tell her to go wherever she wanted to go,' and I asked why he's doing this and was told, 'Because he can,'" Dobler said. "(Phil) didn't have to do that, but living is giving."

Dobler played in three Pro Bowls. He wasn't considered the best player on field, but the most infamous thanks to a take-no-prisoners approach to the game. He would punch defenders and hit players' knees during plays.

Now it's Dobler's knees that are giving him problems. Since retiring, the 10-year NFL veteran has been through 32 knee surgeries and eight knee replacement operations all on his dime. He's applied for disability benefits at least a dozen times, he said, but the NFL retirement board keeps turning him down.

"People ask often how my legs are and I tell them my legs are great. If you look at them, you could ask me how I can say that," Dobler said. "I tell them it's because they are still attached. I can still walk where my wife can't."

Dobler was cut at tryouts the day before the first game and almost didn't make it to the big show with the Cardinals in 1972.

"When I was out there at practice on a Saturday, I counted 55 players. After practice they said head coach Bob Holloway wanted to see me," Dobler said. "I thought he was going to congratulate me for making the team and tell me I'm starting."

Told his release was because of the numbers, Dobler argued his case, saying all players on the field were under the 55-player limit set by the NFL. He quickly realized the mistake when Holloway said, "In the process, did you happen to count yourself?"

An injury to right guard Chuck Hutchinson created an opening, and eight days later, Dobler was back on the team. He has been trying to win battles ever since with his living is giving approach.

"There's a lot more pleasure in giving gifts than receiving them," Dobler said.

CMN, which is affiliated with hospitals across the country and Cox locally, helps children by raising money for research, equipment or uncompensated care. The group is celebrating its 30-year anniversary and its website says since 1983 the organization has raised more than \$4.7 billion for 170 children's hospitals across the United States and Canada.

"All of the proceeds raised at local events go to helping local children," Executive Director Tim

Siebert said. “We are the only CMN network hospital in the 32-county service area here in the Ozarks.”

For Lorenzo, the decision to sponsor the Scramble for Miracles golf tournament was born from the desire of former owner Burk Day to help less-fortunate children.

“He became involved in this seven or eight years ago, and his focus has been raise money for a great organization that helps children. It’s grown to be a very large and successful golf tournament,” Lorenzo said. “Each year we have raised over \$40,000 for CMN in southwest Missouri and I think we will exceed that again this year.”

sports@ccheadliner.com