



THE THING

A **SONE OF THE MOST** respected golf teachers in Queensland, and a contracted coach to the famed Sanctuary Cove, 38-year-old Kevin Healey is responsible for tutoring some of the game's best up-and-coming talent. Along with the club members, he helps to craft the games of local players, including the likes of Ryan Haller, Steve Jones, Matt Ballard, Mathew Guyatt, Paul Donahoo, Gavin Flint and the highly talented Rika Batibasaga.

Healey goes about his work with an unmatched devotion. Which, really, is remarkable given what is happening in his personal life.

Just over a year ago, Kevin's wife Jillian underwent a double mastectomy, during a long battle with breast cancer. In the face of it, at a fundraiser held near Sanctuary Cove after her surgery, Jillian—who Kevin had met 20 years prior at a local pub in Britain—asked not for pity, but understanding. She spoke candidly and openly about her disease, comparing and contrasting it with the every-round battle golfers face. At the time, Healey kept a stern face, shook hands, cracked the odd smile and even told the occasional joke. Around him, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

Twelve months on, the fight hasn't gotten any easier for the Healey family, and as Jillian, Kevin and their three daughters, Eleanor, Satchel and Caitlin forge ahead, admiration of the couple by those who know them continues to grow. The Healeys, as a whole, have proved quite a resilient bunch.

"Turning professional in 1992, playing the game for a living was the only thing on my mind and never at any point was it my aim to be a coach," said Kevin recently. As a player, he was good enough in his teens to have played at county level for Northamptonshire—and in the same league as Lee Westwood, Mark Foster and several other English players who would go on to become stars on the European Tour.

"The coaching side of things back then was really just to supplement my income so I could go and play tournaments.

SYOU CAN'T TEACH

On the course, Gold Coast-based golf coach Kevin Healey is all about preparation. Yet off it, how do you ready for the most shocking, and tragic, event of your life? With his wife Jillian battling breast cancer, Kevin has more to worry about than his clients' swing issues—you just can't tell it. **Bruce Young** writes.

"In late 1996 I came over to Australia for what was to be 12 months to stay with Jill, who was originally from Brisbane. Back then, we were not an 'item' as such but I stayed with her and played golf around the Brisbane area in the hope that my game would improve.

"I eventually had to go back to the UK in March of 1997 as, essentially, I had run out of money. When I got back home, I asked one of my old bosses, Norman Allen, at the Burford Golf Club, if I could have a job. He said yes, and I then began to get more involved and interested in coaching, and before long Jill came over, and in 1998 we married.

"After the wedding I began to search for a full-time coaching job, as the one I had was essentially trying to mix playing with coaching, but I began to realise that my future as a player had its limitations and that coaching was the direction I wanted to go."

After his first full-time coaching stint at Manston Golf Centre near Kent, he moved down to London where Healey picked up a job at Nicklaus Golf School at Gravesend.

The connection with the Nicklaus school would have an additional benefit, as when Kevin and Jillian decided they wanted to head back to Australia after Jillian fell pregnant with her first child, Ellie. He was able to get a job at Lakelands on the Gold Coast, where a Nicklaus Academy had been established.

Or that was what Healey understood to be the case when he and Jill left Britain. When he arrived on the Gold Coast the job he was coming

to was no longer available, as the Jack Nicklaus Academies in Australia had not come to fruition. It was the first of a few curveballs.

"I then had to go around everywhere looking for a job and nobody would give me one. Before, Alan Wilson, who was then running Australasian Golf Academies, said to me I could help him with some of his foreign clients. That was helpful, as it gave me a little money at the time."

A friend in the UK, who had been to the Gold Coast and had had a lesson with the highly respected Gary Edwin, mentioned it to Healey and sparked his interest. "He told me that if I go to the Gold Coast then I had to have a lesson with this white-haired golf instructor who teaches things a bit differently."

That comment eventually led to Healey seeking out Edwin. "I came and saw Gary and he absolutely blew me away. He told me things about my golf swing that nobody had said before, and after a couple of lessons with Gary I asked him if I could then come down and just watch him teach. I even offered to pay him just to observe." Edwin then became something of a mentor to Healey.

"Gary just has an aura about him and thinks two or three steps ahead of people and understands body angles, patterns and movement more than anyone I have met or heard from. He taught me many things but more especially how to analyse things well.

"Some people give Gary stick for what he teaches but he teaches his way because he genuinely believes it is the simplest method.

"I think Gary was quite shocked by my approach and that there had been something a bit different about it. He asked me to his place that Christmas and an arrangement was formed. Originally it was at Hope Island, but then Gary



Healey with star student Rika Batibasaga.



Healey putting Matt Ballard on the right course.

moved to the Glades under the encouragement of Ian Baker-Finch, so I went with him.

“Peter Senior, who had been working with Gary for some time and was based at Hope Island, felt there was a good opportunity for me to go there and work independently, and so after much procrastination, because I was enjoying working with Gary so much, I made the decision in June of 2007 to head to Hope Island to work for myself. Telling Gary was one of the toughest things I’ve had to do.”

While at Hope Island, Healey further developed his group of professionals, Andrew Bonnomme and Stuart Bouvier among those in his stable, in addition to his regular amateur clients. Things were going well enough business-wise but he was not totally happy with some of the other dynamics where he was, and in 2010 was offered the opportunity by Gold Coast professional Peter Shaw to set up his own business at the Robina Woods driving range.

He named his new business Pure Balance Golf and while Shaw was out chasing his dream to play the Tour, Healey was pretty much on his own running the golf academy.

Then in June came the diagnosis of Jill’s disease. It altered everything for Healey as his focus and responsibilities were set on his family. After Shaw made the decision to throw himself into his business and that, along with the logistics of his growing responsibilities at home, it meant Healey would begin to look for other options, perhaps nearer his Gold Coast base at Arundel.

Not long after, Paul Sanders, head of sales at Sanctuary Cove, offered Healey the chance to coach at the high-end, 36-hole Sanctuary Cove facility, where Healey moved in April of this year and where he is now established.

Underlying all the changes in his business life was the ongoing battle Jillian was facing.

“Sanctuary Cove have been fantastic to me. They had thrown out signals in the past and when the time was right I went and saw them and we formed an arrangement that allows me to coach at their outstanding facility along with fellow professionals Michael Jones and Steve Darmody.”

Through his highly talented client, Queensland professional Rika Batibasaga, who came under the attention of iconic British player manager Chubby Chandler during the 2011 Australian PGA Championship, Healey has developed a friendship with Chandler that may yield significant results for him.

In the meantime, he is delighted by the support Chandler is giving Batibasaga as the Fijian-born but Brisbane-based golfer tackles European golf.

It is typical of Healey. While he tackles some of the most difficult times in his own personal life, he is thinking of his own players and how they are faring.

That is why so many of his clients swear by him. A player’s relationship with his coach is not only about what he can learn technically, but the trust between the two plays a key role in the ongoing success of the relationship and of a golfer’s career.

Through everything, Healey remains a dignified and diligent figure in Queensland coaching, alongside his wife, who is resolute with her battle with cancer. There’s a life lesson in there somewhere. ■