





LIVING THE DREAM

AFTER LEADING THE CHICAGO CUBS TO A CHAMPIONSHIP, ANTHONY RIZZO RETURNS HOME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH HIS ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

By Alyssa Fisher

It's been good to be Anthony Rizzo the past month. Not only did the first baseman hit .360 for the Chicago Cubs in the 2016 World Series against the Cleveland Indians—with three doubles and seven runs scored—he also was on the receiving end of the throw that ended the longest championship drought in major North American sports.

When Rizzo fielded the toss from third baseman Kris Bryant in the bottom of the 10th inning, the groundout that ended an epic 8-7 victory in Game 7, it sealed the Cubs' first World Series title in 108 years. The play touched off a celebration that, for the Parkland resident, shows no signs of letting up.

It started with a parade down Chicago's Michigan Avenue, where Rizzo and his teammates waved to fans from double-decker buses, an all-day party that marked perhaps the least-productive work day in Windy City history. Then came a two-scene appearance on "Saturday Night Live" with fellow players David Ross and Dexter Fowler: one where Rizzo played a stripper at a grandmother's surprise bachelorette party (she already had died of shock) and a "Weekend Update" skit where he sang "Go Cubs Go" with former SNL cast member and die-hard Cubs fan Bill Murray.

The 27-year-old then chatted up Jimmy Fallon on "The Tonight Show," discussing game-day superstitions and the 17-minute rain delay following the ninth inning in Game 7 that fired up the team and led to a two-run outburst in the 10th. Rizzo assured Fallon that he watched the game—about five times on replay.

If that's not enough, he also made the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, his excitement radiating off the page.

It's been an unforgettable run for the three-time All-Star, who is only eight years removed from another life-altering experience. In 2008, at age 18, Rizzo was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. No matter how bad he felt during treatments, he knew he had to stay strong for those around him, especially as his grandmother battled breast cancer at the same time. "I believe that an individual does not battle cancer, but rather the whole family does," he wrote on the website for the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation, the organization he and his family started when he went into remission to raise money for cancer research and support children and their families fighting the disease.

Rizzo paused the celebration long enough to speak to his hometown magazine about the World Series, his foundation—and the fifth annual Walk-Off for Cancer 5K, Dec. 11 at Pine Trails Park in Parkland.

How did you have the presence of mind to tuck the ball in your back pocket after the out that sealed the World Series?

It's a piece of history. If I throw my glove off, that ball goes flying somewhere. In every replay I've seen of every World Series since I was a kid, a player has taken the ball and kept it. I put it in my pocket to celebrate.

Was your family in Cleveland for Game 7? How did you celebrate that night—or at least the parts you can mention in a family magazine?

My mom and dad were with me every game for the whole playoff. My brother, sister-in-law, their son and my girlfriend were there in Cleveland. We popped Champagne on the roof of the

clubhouse and took pictures with the trophy. Then all the families flew back with us on our team charter. That was a really good moment.

Who was the first person from Parkland that you either spoke to or heard from after the game, beyond family?

That's a tough one—I got so many text messages that I just caught up on. My friend Jordan Brown is probably the first person I called; I went to high school with him. Everyone couldn't believe it. The support I got from everyone back home has been amazing.

What part of Game 7 do you keep replaying in your mind? The final out? The team meeting during the rain delay?

The last out, really. Just celebrating and winning. The whole thing, the whole journey is over now. A lot of work went into it.

Do you have the sense that this is only the beginning for this group of Cubs?

I hope so. I want to say this is only the beginning, but it's so hard to do what we did. The competition in all sports, like baseball, is so good and not easy. But we should be contenders for years to come.

Have you had time yet to process what this means to you personally, given everything you've been through?

For sure. It's really the ultimate dream to win the World Series. A lot of things happened along the way, and to overcome cancer is the biggest obstacle of my life. I'm grateful for it, and when I look back and think about that and now where I am, it's amazing.



Left: Rizzo leads participants at the Walk-Off. Below and next page: Sights from the Walk-Off



From left: Anthony Rizzo; his dad, John; mom, Laurie; and brother, John

Take us back to the early conversations about starting the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation. Why was it so important to you, and what were you hoping to accomplish?

At the time I got sick, Lance Armstrong was working on his Livestrong Foundation, so that's what me and my family immediately thought of and leaned on. When we were able to start this, it was just to raise money for pediatric cancer. As the foundation grew, we wanted to start helping families that were struggling, couldn't pay their bills and really didn't know what this process was like. We've helped in so many different ways. It's incredible.

Your mother spoke to us about how the first Walk-Off wildly exceeded

expectations. Why do you think the Walk-Off and what it represents struck a chord?

I think because it's Parkland, and that's where I grew up. Doing that in your hometown is always awesome. A lot of people have come to show their support, and it just credits Parkland and the South Florida community. It's about helping and wanting to give back.

When people battling the disease talk to you or seek some counsel, what do you share with them about how you were able to stay so positive? And why that's so important?

When I talk to people about going through cancer, I make sure they know that the sun is still going to rise tomorrow. At the end of the day, people feel bad for you, but life still goes

on. You have to keep fighting and keep staying positive. When you feel good, enjoy your life. And when you're feeling bad, just know that there are better days ahead.

This is the fifth anniversary of the Walk-Off. What have you learned about the cancer journey that individuals and families go through, that you didn't know when this started?

I went through it first-hand, but everyone deals with different experiences and has their own unique situation. I think we do a good job making people feel loved, and that's important. A little love, a little reaching out goes a long way for these kids and especially their families.

Do you think you'll ever have to buy a beer in Chicago or Parkland ever again?

Chicago? I sure hope not. Parkland? Hopefully, it's a little more low-key, and I can go under the radar. But we'll see.



Walk-Off for Cancer

What: Anthony Rizzo will be in Parkland for the fifth annual Walk-Off for Cancer 5K. There will be entertainment, refreshments and raffles. Participants will receive a T-shirt and gift bag. Sign up early—the event sold out last year.

When: Dec. 11; 7:30 a.m. registration, 9 a.m. walk

Where: Pine Trails Park, 10555 Trails End, Parkland

Register: register.racepartner.com/WalkOffForCancer