

PROUD TO PLAY MY PART

Raising money for the Alan Shearer Foundation

Back in 2014 I had the opportunity to raise my golfing game – by using it to help a charity in the North East which is dear to my heart. I came up with the idea of a golfing challenge to raise money for the Alan Shearer Foundation, which helps provide highly specialist disability, respite, residential and social provision for children with complex disabilities and acute sensory impairments.

I approached the all-time premier league top global scorer, and BBC Match of the Day pundit, Alan Shearer himself, and was delighted when he took me up on the idea of the ‘golfing challenge’.

This golf challenge did not resemble a normal round of golf. I had to challenge one of the best ever English sportsmen and take him out of his comfort zone.

So, I designed a golf round stretching 18 different courses across England. We simply played just one hole per course to make up the 18 hole golf round! The journey began in Newcastle and ended in Bracknell and Crowthorne.

Close House golf club in Newcastle is Alan Shearer’s membership course, so this was an ideal starting place. I stayed with Alan the night before and we started the challenge at first light. The banter swiftly followed. Having played in Newcastle we then travelled to Manchester, Leeds, across the Midlands, and headed south.

Feisal and Alan Shearer - 2014

We travelled by any means we could – train, helicopters and road - to cover the distance between holes. However, we travelled mainly by helicopter. We had a major scare at Leeds with an emergency landing at a main airport due to excessive fog.

Whilst Shearer looked sick with worry, it didn't stop us continuing our journey on this golf challenge. Overall, it was so much fun and were raising a significant amount of money.

Over 12 hours the competition was extremely close, however Shearer finally beat me on the 17th hole at the former Blue Mountain golf course in Bracknell. Many local people were waiting to watch as the helicopter came in to land. Despite losing, I continued to the final hole at East Berkshire, where my family greeted me, and my son played the last hole with Shearer and I. For each course, we also gave two local residents the chance to play a hole with us. At East Berkshire Golf Club, I remember one man was given a dream birthday present when he won the chance to play. His wife had entered his name into a tombola at the club and he was drawn out of the hat on his birthday. I'll never forget his smile.

We attracted a great deal of coverage from the BBC and Sky, who followed the golf challenge on the day. With Shearer repeatedly telling journalists that he's played golf for years, "but never like this."

And although Shearer beat me at the death, the real win was the money we raised: over £20,000 in total.

We subsequently went on to raise further funds for the Alan Shearer Foundation. I keep track of the charity's developments to this day, and am delighted to see it flourish.

If you wish to make a donation, please visit the Alan Shearer Foundation at www.alanshearerfoundation.org.uk



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