



RBC Canadian Open July 20 to 26 2009 - Dean Walker
Photographer – Kathy Russell

I've played sports my whole life, throughout my school years, and, as an adult, in any number of clubs and leagues. But now I'm in my 50s and I felt that was the time to learn to play golf. I took it up a couple of years ago and I love it. I've played in charity tournaments for CHS, in a league, and with friends. Of course I'm still a novice – I'm no Mike Weir – but I'm willing to be patient and continue to learn and improve because I enjoy it.

My son Byron is a full time at student the University of Toronto (Mississauga campus) and he has been working part time since May 2008 at the renowned Glen Abbey Golf Club in Oakville. He worked during the 2008 RBC Canadian Open and met many famous golfers. I am proud of him and I know that was a rich experience for him.

And that's what got me thinking about volunteering at the next Canadian Open. I knew it would be a great experience for me, too. (And of course I would like to meet the famous pros as well!) I asked Byron how I could apply to volunteer but he didn't know because Glen Abbey is not actually responsible for the RBC Canadian Open, although it is often hosted on that course. I checked the internet and learned about the Royal Canadian Golf Association, which is the body responsible for the RBC Canadian Open wherever it is played in Canada. I submitted my volunteer application online then emailed Andrew Stewart, the Tournament Coordinator. I let him know I was Deaf and let him know how I would communicate and he didn't foresee any problems.

When I submitted my application I had to pay \$60.00 to be a volunteer. You get a lot for that \$60, though, including a great Adidas golf shirt, Adidas cap, a free subscription to Golf Canada Magazine, two free passes for the week of the Open (one for myself and one for friends or family to use), free parking, an RCGA Golf Card, and more.



I was selected to work on security. The security volunteers are responsible to assist in controlling access to restricted areas on-site, including the player services area, the clubhouse, range area and other secured areas where the public is prohibited and usually only the golfers, and sometimes their caddies, are allowed to enter. We also ensured that patrons displayed the proper credentials to enter different areas. Experience as a security guard or in law enforcement is not required since as volunteers we were not expected to deal with any major any physical disturbances, which on-site paid security or police would be called to handle.

After being selected I went to Volunteer Orientation Meeting with an interpreter. I met the Security Committee Co- Chairs (Bob and Darren) and they thanked me and the other volunteers for our service. I learned some history about the Open and Glen Abbey and they also presented their expectations and our responsibilities. They needed volunteers from the Monday to Sunday – the duration of the event. I received my personal schedule at the Orientation and found I would be on duty on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. That meant I could attend as a fan on Thursday, Friday and Sunday. Orientation helped me feel prepared and I felt ready for it.

I reported for duty on the first day – Monday, July 20. Bob and Darren were on-site. We had no problem communicating and I brought my notepad and a pen. Darren had actually learned some signs on a website and was able to greet me and chat briefly in ASL! The Monday event was the “Mike Weir Charity Classic”. Famous actors, athletes, and politicians attended and played to raise money for Mike Weir’s Foundation. Michael Jordan was one of the celebrities and tons of fans came out to see him.

That day I was responsible for guarding the entrance all the players – including the celebrities – used to get to the change rooms and bar area. I was stationed there for five hours, including break times. On break times I managed to get my cap signed by nine golfers. I loved it. I got to see them all up close. I also got to see Byron briefly because he was working in the bar area, close to my post.



After the tournament that day fans assembled hoping to see Michael Jordan as he left and a huge crowd gathered. When he exited the change rooms he did stop to sign autographs on things people had brought, including photographs, jerseys, basketballs, and even a pair of running shoes. To manage that crowd all of us security volunteers were busy and the professional guards and police were also on hand to maintain the rope line separating the fans from Michael Jordan and the cars waiting to take him away. That was very demanding and a good way to start before the big professional event began on Thursday.

My wife Kelly came with me that day too and she learned something about golfing culture.

I met other volunteers as well, two who had come from as far away as Ottawa.

The second day was a practice day for the golfers. That day I was stationed at the range where they were practicing. It was a great place to watch them practice and see their techniques. I want to try some of what learned from watching them. My friend Kathy Russell came to watch and took some pictures of spectators, golfers, and me. It started to rain that afternoon and while some of the golfers continued none of them stayed out all day. Fans left as well by late afternoon so I finished early that day.

Wednesday was better weather and that day’s event was the “Pro-Am,” where each foursome includes one professional golfer and three amateurs. That day I was posted at the entrance to the rooftop patio. Access was quite limited so I had to check badges and passes for anyone wanting to

enter and only let those in with the appropriate credentials. This area was close to the sixth hole and because it is high (a rooftop) had a beautiful view over the course

The 2009 RBC Canadian Open officially began on Thursday but I was off duty Thursday and Friday and didn't end up going to watch.

But on Saturday my shift started at 6:30 am and I was in the lounge/patio area near 18th hole. This was a great location that day because every golfer passed me after he finished on the way to the lockers and scoring office.

Unfortunately it rained again Saturday so they didn't finish the first round as scheduled and play was suspended until Sunday. Nonetheless they went ahead with a volunteer party later in the afternoon and Kelly and I went to it. At the party two of the most senior officials came over to thank me for volunteering. Darren, one of the Security Co-Chairs brought over Tournament Chairman Bruce Heffer to introduce me to him. Bruce told me he had worked with the Canadian Open for 25 years and that I was the first Deaf volunteer in history! Darren told Bruce I was doing a great job and they both hoped I would volunteer again next year. I thanked them for their kind words and told them it had been a great experience for me.

In fact, Saturday was supposed to be my last day but it rained again Sunday so the entire tournament continued Monday. On Sunday night I checked in with Bob and Darren and was not surprised to learn they did need volunteers for Monday. Many people had to go back to work and no one was actually scheduled for Monday because the tournament was supposed to finish on Sunday. I was happy to pitch in. I went morning and stayed until late in the afternoon.



Two funny things happened Monday. One and, without anything, signed to become a recognize this stunned that she me. It turns out she

the ECD school and she recognized me. After introductions I explained to her that I had applied online. She is interested in volunteering next year. The other funny thing that happened was a spectator tried to ask me about something. I said, "Sorry, I can't hear" so she spoke very slowly. What she wanted to ask me was how she could find her hearing aids, which she lost around the 10th hole. She was laughing because I am Deaf and she was looking for hearing aids! I smiled at her and we both agreed they will be hard to find...

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happened during my shift woman came up to me introducing herself or me, asking how I had volunteer. I did not woman at first so I was just started signing with is Paula, an interpreter at

So that's an overview of my volunteer experience at the 2009 RBC Canadian Open. I am so glad I did it. I felt I had full access to communication and was able to participate without any social and barriers. Also I can share some of what I learned with our Deaf golf organizations. I would really encourage anyone who is interested in applying next year. The RBC Canadian Open 2010 will be hosted in Toronto. If you need more information, check the website - <http://www.rbccanadianopen.com> and look for 2010. Hope to see you there next year. You will have a great experience too!