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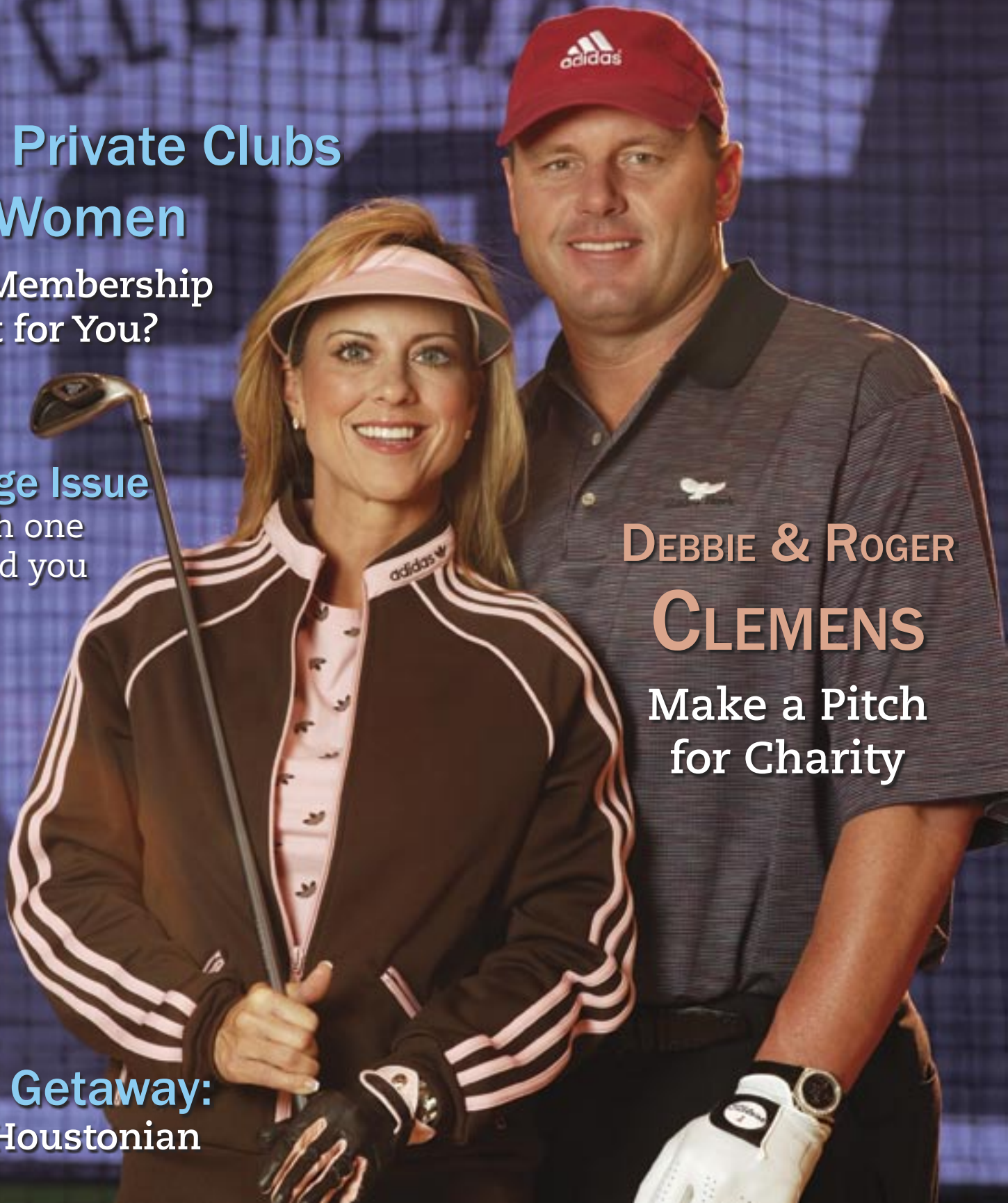
Wedge Issue

Which one
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DEBBIE & ROGER
CLEMENS

Make a Pitch
for Charity

Golf Getaway:
The Houstonian




cover story

Debbie & Roger Clemens

Make a pitch
for charity

By Rebecca MacDonald

A woman, Debbie Clemens, is captured in the middle of a golf swing on a green field. She is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt with black accents on the sleeves, black pants with two white stripes down each leg, a black visor, and white gloves. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail. In the background, there are trees and a blurred green field. A pile of white golf balls is visible on the ground near her feet.

Debbie Clemens is not one to rest on her husband's laurels. In fact, she has turned her position as the wife of professional baseball pitcher Roger Clemens into a platform to raise money for charity, increase awareness for women's health issues and promote a healthy lifestyle. She practices what she preaches: at age 39, the active mother of four boys posed in a swimsuit for a photo layout with her husband for *Sports Illustrated*. She is also an avid golfer with a 14 handicap who loves to compete in her clubs' tournaments.

Clemens warms up before the Day of Golf for Kids charity tournament.

In fact, neither the famous pitcher—nicknamed “The Rocket” for his record-breaking fastball—or his wife are shy about using their success to raise money for charity. Specifically, for charities that help kids. Together with Giff Nielsen, former quarterback for the Houston Oilers and now sports anchor at KHOU in Houston, the couple recently hosted a Day of Golf for Kids tournament. The tournament was held on two courses at The Houstonian Country Club and Shadow Hawk Country Club. A foursome in the tournament at the Houstonian Course, playing with PGA golf pros, was \$5,000. A foursome at the more exclusive Shadow Hawk course, featuring celebrities such as late night talk show host Carson Daly, actor Robert Wuhl (Arlis) and others cost \$25,000 per foursome. The tournament raised over a half million dollars for the Roger Clemens Foundation, which benefits several children’s charities in the Houston area.

Meeting “The Rocket”

Originally from Arlington, Debbie Clemens went to Spring Woods High School in Houston, where she first met Roger, already a rising sports star. He was new to the school, but Debbie was dating someone else at the time, and the couple never really got to know each other.

Roger Clemens went on to play for the University of Texas in Austin, where he was later drafted by the Boston Red Sox. During his first year with the Sox, he was named Rookie of the Year. Later, he left the Red Sox to play for the Toronto Blue Jays and then the New York Yankees. He is a six-time winner of the prestigious Cy Young award, and during his career achieved a record 300 wins and 4,000 strikeouts.

Clemens announced his retirement after the Yankees lost the 2003 World Series to the Florida Marlins. But when teammate Andy Pettitte—a fellow Houstonian—signed as a free agent with the Astros in December 2003, Clemens decided to become an Astro as well the following January.

In January 1984, his first season with the Red Sox, Roger and Debbie met again in Houston and began dating. By April, they were engaged, and were married that November.

Golf and wine tasting

Clemens says her husband was the first to take up the game, when she bought him his first set of clubs. He says he only took one lesson, albeit from Butch Harmon, and his natural athletic talent did the rest.

Then he started playing all the time!” exclaims Clemens. “So I decided I was going to learn, too.”

Although she is also athletic, Clemens says the game didn’t come easily at first for her. “When I started



The Clemens practice golf shots in the gym behind their home, where “The Rocket’s” pitching setup doubles as a practice range.

That was 20 years ago. For their anniversary this past year, they went to Palm Springs, where Clemens says she got to play in the Skins Pro Am. “That was really fun,” she says. “Tiger Woods was standing there while I was hitting practice swings! But I didn’t get nervous the whole day. I got more nervous yesterday (at the charity tournament) than I did that day.”

“It’s a pretty nice perk for me to be able to take my wife golfing for our 20th anniversary,” observes Roger.

hitting a golf ball, I’d hit it about 100 feet,” she says. “I couldn’t get it off the ground. I would just about cry, I was so frustrated.”

Clemens says she attended a golf school in order to better learn the game. “I went with (PGA TOUR pro) Billy Andrade’s wife, Jody, to the John Jacobs School of Golf in Napa Valley, at the Chardonnay Club. It was six hours of swinging every day, then we’d go to a wine tasting. That was my introduction to golf.”

After that, says Clemens, she learned mostly from her husband. “He made me stick with it, and I’m glad he did, because after the first couple of years, you get to that point when you hit a really good shot, and it keeps you coming back.”

Playing Augusta

Today, Clemens says the couple take their clubs with them everywhere when they travel. Asked which courses are her favorites, Clemens says she once got to play at Augusta National. “It was fabulous, except I wasn’t prepared for the par three holes, some of them were 180 yards! They don’t have women’s tees, and it was 6,205 yards from the men’s tees. So I was tripling the par threes, but scoring par on the par fives.” She adds, “I shot a 98, but I’m not happy with that! I want to



Clemens, here with husband Roger and their dog, “The Rocket,” started a new business this year called Jacket Happy. The jackets are available on her web site at www.debbieclemens.com.

practice hitting longer par threes and someday go back to Augusta.”

that I’ve done something that’s just for me,” she muses.

Jacket Happy

Glad to be based in Houston again after traveling for years to the cities where her husband played, Clemens says she doesn’t miss the travel, but that her life is as busy as ever. She’s a mother of four boys: Koby, 18; Kory, 16; Kacy, 10; and Kody, 8. The “Ks” are a hallmark of their father, in baseball lingo the K stands for a strikeout. And following in his father’s footsteps, Koby recently signed as a freshman with his father’s alma mater, the UT Longhorns, to play third base.

Clemens has her own web site, debbieclemens.com, which she says, “Is focused around the four ‘F’s’—family, fitness, fashion and fun. I need a ‘G’ in there for golf!” she laughs.

This past September, Clemens also launched a new business, called Jacket Happy, designing her own line of denim jackets. The jackets are trimmed with colorful furs and exotic leathers, and each features a different motif. “It’s the first time in my life

Can I have a ruling?

Now a 14 handicap, Clemens says her goal this year is to win the club championship at Shadow Hawk this spring. She began competing in tournaments, she says, in order to become a better player. “But it’s hard to start!” she admits. “You’re nervous because you don’t know all the rules.”

She recalls one of her first tournaments, when one of her shots landed in a bunker. “I went to hit out of the sand, and the ball popped straight up, and went right down my shirt! I didn’t know what to do, so I pulled out my shirt and the ball dropped out and rolled. And the only thing I could think was, did I just incur a penalty?”

Clemens says her advice for women taking up the game is to stick with it. “I was a 40 handicap when I started playing. I really started at the very beginning! But golf is something that, if you stick with it, you can get better and better. And it’s something you can do forever.”

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