

Hearts of champions: Annika Sorenstam and Eli Manning

A Super Bowl hero and one of the best golfers ever team up to show how much a caring athlete can do.

By Brian Truitt and Dennis McCafferty

Settling in at a Manhattan photo studio, New York Giants quarterback and 2008 Super Bowl MVP Eli Manning is making his debut as a fashion photographer. The pressure is on: His subject today is Annika Sorenstam, one of the best women golfers ever, dressed in a purple sheath.

"Work it! Arch your back!" Manning playfully barks to Sorenstam, as the golfer gamely flexes her biceps and twists her body into numerous poses. "If it's not uncomfortable," Manning jokes, "then you're in the wrong position!" Before long, Manning yields the camera to the real pros, and the annual USA WEEKEND Magazine Most Caring Athletes cover shoot proceeds.

Both athletes enjoy a lofty perch in the world of sports. With an amazing 72 LPGA victories, including 10 major tournament championships, Sorenstam has announced that she's stepping away from pro golf, effective at the year's end. Manning, of course, won the NFL's ultimate prize for one of the league's most storied and high-profile franchises.

And both athletes represent the best when it comes to giving back to their communities. They reach out to young people with scholarships, children's hospital projects and friendly visits -- or a round of golf -- to help brighten the lives of seriously ill kids. Somehow, it's not surprising that Sorenstam and Manning can be a bit competitive when it comes to helping others. "I don't want to be a little player in this foundation game," Sorenstam says. "You either go for it, or you don't bother showing up."

To learn more about the many ways Manning and Sorenstam show they care, read on:



Annika Sorenstam
Age: 37
Victories: 72 LPGA, 10 Majors
Years Pro: 16
College: University of Arizona

Eli Manning
Age: 27
Victories: 2008 Super Bowl MVP
Years Pro: 5
College: Ole Miss

Eli Manning: Helping on all his home fronts

For Manning, the seeds of giving back grew during his college years, when he was a star quarterback at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. Sometimes he'd head over to a local elementary school and read to a class. "Oxford's so small that any school there is just going to be two or three minutes away," he says. "And I liked hanging out with the kids."

Then he started visiting Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children in Jackson, Miss., about two hours away, where children with serious and often potentially fatal illnesses are treated. After one 14-year-old leukemia patient told Manning that he was a huge Ole Miss fan, the teen asked the quarterback to autograph his bare head. "He just had the biggest smile on his face, so I had to do it," Manning says. "We stayed in touch. Then I saw him recently when I went back to visit the hospital. He knew I was coming and stopped in to say hello. He's 18 now, has a full head of hair, and he's doing great."

The New York Giants quarterback is looking forward to more success stories as he moves into the second year of a five-year campaign to raise \$5 million for improvements to the hospital. Manning has pledged to raise half the funds himself.

"They're overloaded with kids who need help," says Manning, who also is active in fundraising for Saint Vincent Catholic Medical Centers in New York. "They need more room and more resources, and I wanted to jump on that. It hits me hard to see kids go through these kinds of illnesses. It makes me feel helpless."

Manning's mother, Olivia, and father, Archie (once a longtime quarterback for the New Orleans Saints), instilled a sense of compassion at home. The couple still lives in the same Garden District home as when the senior Manning played, and they stay connected to community causes. Perhaps their most high-profile cause was the rebuilding of post-Katrina New Orleans. As is typical for the Manning family, the whole crew got involved after the 2005 storm. Once Eli and brother Peyton -- the Indianapolis Colts quarterback and our 2002 Most Caring Athlete -- received word that their parents were safe, the sons immediately decided they had to get down to Baton Rouge and do what they could. Each called on longtime sponsors to donate needed resources. Grocery stores offered diapers, baby formula, food and water, for instance. Within days, both brothers were handing out donated supplies from a plane.

"We wanted to do anything we could," Manning says. "When we got there, we heard all kinds of stories. There were kids who told us they hadn't spoken to their parents in days, and they were scared for them. But throughout it all, they kept this encouraging, persevering attitude. That's humbling to see."

Manning's fundraising efforts for Saint Vincent Catholic Medical Centers, go to [**svcmc.org/elimanning**](http://svcmc.org/elimanning).