

KEN DANEYKO

Hanging up his skates after 20 years in the NHL, this Devil now is busy giving his due in the fight to cure paralysis



AP Photo/Bill Kosman

After winning three Stanley Cup Championships, Ken Daneyko is teaming up with the New Jersey chapter of the Buoniconti Fund.

Ken Daneyko always has believed it's better to give than to receive. Until recently, that meant giving a bone-jarring check to any opponent who dared to venture near his New Jersey Devils goal.

But now that his 20-year career as a professional hockey player is over, the former defenseman is taking the old adage to heart.

After helping the Devils win the Stanley Cup three times and receiving so much from the world of hockey, Daneyko has decided to give back to others with the same sense of commitment and dedication he has shown on the ice.



BY STACY BOTWINICK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY SPECTOR

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Daneyko retired last year at the age of 39 after a record-shattering 20-year stint as a defenseman with the New Jersey Devils hockey team – receiving countless awards and accolades for the accomplishments of his extraordinary career. A Windsor, Ontario native, Daneyko was drafted by the Devils in 1982 and played 18 full seasons with the team, appearing in a franchise record 388 consecutive games and 175 post-season contests.

- Three Stanley Cup championships.
- Devils Unsung Hero Award (1986-87).
- Devils Good Guy Award (1989-90).
- Professional Hockey Writer's Association's Bill Masterton Trophy for perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication.



The Miami Project

Throughout his NHL career, Daneyko always has represented the Devils in numerous charitable appearances. Experiencing his first year of retirement, he now has the time to become more intimately involved in some of the causes that have become close to his heart. One such association is The Miami Project, an organization dedicated to finding a cure for paralysis.

Dr. Barth Green, a leader in the field of spinal-cord injuries, founded The Miami Project in 1985. It is considered the world's largest, most comprehensive spinal-cord injury research center, bringing together world-renown scientists and supporting their mission to bring about more effective treatments and, ultimately, a cure for paralysis. The organization gained national attention following the football-related injury of legendary Miami Dolphin's linebacker Nick Buoniconti's son, Marc. The Buoniconti Fund now serves as the national fundraising arm for The Miami Project, with local chapters continuing to be established throughout the country.

Great Scott!

Fueled by the interest of his wife, Jonnalyn, Daneyko became involved with the Buoniconti Fund about two years ago, helping to raise \$2.4 million at the organization's 18th Annual Great Sports Legends Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City and playing in The Miami Project's Roger King Invitational Golf Tournament in Atlantic City, New Jersey. But it was only after meeting a young man named Scott Chesney that Daneyko realized the true meaning of what the foundation was trying to accomplish.

Chesney is the 33 year old who started the New Jersey chapter of the Buoniconti Fund. Living with paralysis since the age of 15, Chesney is nothing less than a dynamo on wheels.

When Daneyko and Chesney first met, there was an instant connection. "Scott is in a wheelchair, but nothing stops him," Daneyko marvels. "I was impressed by his attitude and everything he had accomplished.

"Scott is just so full of life," he adds. "Despite his challenges, he approaches each situation with extraordinary spirit and life. He has chosen to live his life positively – not looking at it in any other way. He makes you appreciate what you have and not take it for granted."

And when it comes to Chesney's feelings about Daneyko, it's obvious that the admiration is mutual. "Kenny's got the perfect combination – a heart of



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Scott Chesney, pictured here with Ken Daneyko, started the New Jersey chapter of the Buoniconti Fund.

pure gold and the desire to want to help,” says Chesney. “In addition, as a hockey player he takes this to heart because I think he knows how close he was to the possibility of becoming paralyzed himself.”

Taking It Personally

It’s true that Daneyko’s commitment to The Miami Project is strengthened by his own personal gratitude for his health. With 80 percent of paralysis victims characterized as males 18-35 years of age, playing a sport as hazardous as hockey could have caused him the loss of more than just a few teeth.

This can happen to people at any given moment – so it hits close to home,” Daneyko says. “Athletes – especially hockey players – understand how fortunate we are to not get hurt, and when we’re healthy, we don’t just take that for granted. I feel I was so lucky to stay healthy in my career and now I’m able to be here to help in any way I can.”

One Step at a Time

With the help of people like Daneyko and the huge team of doctors, volunteers and contributors who support the organization, The Miami Project is making huge strides in areas such as rehabilitation, the use of assisted walking devices, cell transplants and surgical interventions.

For Chesney, The Miami Project has helped make one of his biggest dreams come true. Told he could never walk again or father a child, with the support and expertise of fertility specialists at The Miami Project, Chesney now is the proud dad of a baby daughter, Nia. “And if having my own child is possible – I’m going to get back on my feet again, too,” Chesney insists.

In an effort to spread his strong faith and inspiration to others, Chesney has formed “Devotion to Motion,” offering his services in motivational keynote presentations and one-on-one and group/family coaching.

As for Daneyko, by giving his time to help The Miami Project, he finds that he also is helping himself. “Being involved with The Miami Project gives me the opportunity to do my part and try to make things better,” he says. “When I do something to help others, it’s an overwhelming feeling. It makes me feel grounded – gives me a foundation. It’s amazing to get caught up in all those good feelings. It’s so gratifying for me to give back and to finally realize that’s what life is all about.” **I**

