

Who's News

Shriners Patient Named First *Sports Illustrated* "Young Sportsman Of The Year"

(NAPSA)—Some 13-year-old boys like to watch television or play video games to fill their time, or ride bicycles or scooters, and hang out with friends. One however, Chris Coy of Elk City, OK, spends endless hours playing racquetball.

An outstanding national racquetball champion who has overcome numerous physical obstacles, he was honored by *Sports Illustrated* magazine with their inaugural "Young Sportsman of the Year" award—selected from six finalists who were chosen from among 200 junior athletes.

"This award was not just for racquetball, but for all sports and junior athletes of all ages," said Coy. The award was presented to him by tennis star Serena Williams and musical group *NSYNC's Justin Timberlake and Chris Kirkpatrick.

At six weeks of age, Coy was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in his stomach, which required three years of chemotherapy. At age 3, he developed a vascular infection that spread down his leg. By age 4, he became a patient of Shriners Hospital for Children in Shreveport, LA, where his left foot and ankle were amputated and he received his first prosthetic leg.

"In the beginning, there was a lot of adjustment," said Chris's mom, Susan Coy. "He didn't want to wear his prosthetic leg to preschool. We covered it up so that the other kids wouldn't see it. That seemed to help him, and as he got more comfortable, he began wearing shorts."

Chris first became interested in racquetball at age 7 when his parents bought "The Health Club" in his hometown. "I spent a lot of time watching the guys play and would get in the court and practice on shots that I watched them do," he said.

His love of racquetball has helped in other ways. "Chris needs



Chris Coy has overcome obstacles to become a championship racquetball player.

to stay in shape in order to help combat his other medical conditions," Susan explained. "Every few months we go to Shriners to get a new prosthetic leg because he'll dive and slide on the court and tear up his prosthesis."

Shriners Hospital recently provided Chris with a new prosthetic leg that has better flexibility in the foot and ankle area, making it easier for him to hit forehand shots and allowing him to move quicker. "If it weren't for Shriners, he wouldn't be where he is," explained his dad, Mike Coy.

With incredible determination and support from his family, Chris has had extraordinary success, playing in his first Junior World tournament at age 8. He continued to play and improve his game with his dedication and four-hour-a-day practices. In 1998, he captured his first medal at the Junior Olympic championships: a silver in the boys' 10-and-under doubles. Later that year, Chris earned two silver medals in the boys' 10 world junior singles and doubles competitions.

In 2000, he also played at the adult U.S. National Singles Championships, where he won the men's 24-C/D skill-level division, playing against opponents more than 10 years his senior. Chris went on to win the gold medal in Men's C-level after beating the top-seeded player, age 41, in the semis.

"The more he plays, the better he gets," said Mike.

"Chris Coy Day" was proclaimed in Elk City on January 5, 2001. Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, Senator Gilmer Capps, and the state House of Representatives also have honored him. Classmates and teachers in Elk City are proud of Chris's achievements, and other parents are very supportive. "They don't look at Chris as having a handicap, but as an example for their own kids," his mom said.

Chris has set goals for his future. "I want to win a national and junior world title. And when I'm old enough, I want to play on the U.S. Junior National Team," he said. He'll become eligible to qualify for the team when he turns 14. He wants to eventually go to the Olympics (racquetball might be added by 2008) and play on the International Racquetball Tour.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide free treatment to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada. Shriners Hospitals provide free treatment to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.