

## **DWA foundation addresses mental-health awareness**

By Brian McDonough

It's okay not to be okay.

That's the message the newfound "Don't Walk Alone: The Walker Tobin Memorial Foundation" is committed to hammering home as it focuses on raising the awareness of and tackling head-on the importance of mental-health education and action amongst young athletes.

The foundation, which was formally introduced last month at the Los Angeles Jr. Kings/LA Lions eighth annual Golf Tournament & Social at Mountain Gate Country Club in Los Angeles, will provide mental-health counseling for players in the Jr. Kings/LA Lions program free-of-charge, as well as designate funds to high-character student-athletes within the club whose families are in need of financial assistance.

Don't Walk Alone was named in memory of Walker Tobin, a South Bay resident and hockey enthusiast who took his own life a year ago. Tobin was close friends with Brett Beebe and Ryan Shaw of South Bay-based Douglas Elliman Real Estate, both of whom spearheaded the Don't Walk Alone initiative.

"Walker was everything you could want in a friend," said Beebe, a former Jr. Kings player who also serves as head coach of the club's 13U AAA and 10U A2 teams. "He was loyal, energetic, passionate, empathetic and selfless. He was the life of the party, and usually the one who arranged the party.

"He was the ultimate glue-guy; he brought people together from all walks of life and just made everyone feel good about themselves. He left us too soon because we couldn't see his struggle; he was the last one we thought was hurting on the inside."

Long-term, the foundation plans to create a platform and curriculum for all youth sports organizations to adopt in an effort to free young athletes from the current stigmas surrounding their mental well-being. That includes educating coaches and administrators on how to identify children who might be struggling and how to help those players and their families address their issues in a comforting environment.

“Being involved in athletics my entire life, you’re taught from a young age to be tough and fearless all the time and that nothing should get to you, mentally, and from my experience that’s not always a healthy approach,” said Beebe, who also played hockey in college and professionally.

“A lot of times those feelings and emotions carry over into adulthood and what you’ve been told growing up about your psyche just isn’t realistic and oftentimes dangerous, so we created this platform for young athletes to share their experiences with professional counselors in an effort to aid in their overall well-being.”

Don’t Walk Alone was formed less than a year after Ryan Shaw Group at Douglas Elliman Real Estate generously contributed \$10,000 towards the Jr. Kings/LA Lions “Match Game” fundraising initiative. Those dollars were targeted straight towards eight members of the Jr. Kings and Lions as recipients of the first annual Walker Tobin Memorial Scholarship.

“The investment Brett, Ryan and the entire Douglas Elliman Real Estate team has put towards our club, specifically our players and our families, recently is inspiring,” said Jr. Kings executive director Kelly Sorensen. “To expand our relationship through this foundation speaks volumes about their character and commitment to the overall health and well-being of our players.”

“Our end-goal is to reach young athletes, regardless the sport or talent level, and teach them the value of taking care of their mental health,” Beebe added. “We need our kids to realize it’s important to ask for help if they’re not feeling like their normal selves and need someone to talk to.”

With an online platform expected to be live in the coming weeks, those interested in learning more about the foundation or contributing to the non-profit 501(c)(3) entity can contact Beebe at [brett@ryanshawhomes.com](mailto:brett@ryanshawhomes.com).

Both Beebe and Shaw will match donations up to \$10,000 until the end of the calendar year and also donate a portion of their real-estate sales from the hockey community to the cause.

“This issue hits close to home for both Ryan and I for obvious reasons,” said Beebe. “Asking for help regardless the circumstance isn’t a weakness or something to be ashamed of, and that’s what needs to resonate loudest through this initiative.”

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## NOTES

Shaw, a Southern California native who played hockey growing up and is a former Los Angeles Kings employee and El Segundo Regents/Jr. Kings coach

All while Tobin's legacy will live on through two of his favorite things: kids and sports.

“What we're doing is addressing this international crisis at the grassroots level, and I believe it'll make a lasting impact on both our local hockey community and society as a whole.”