

THE PLAYERS



MICHELE CONLEY

By Veena Trehan

Her claim to fame: I had no hair but I won the singles championship at the Kenwood Country Club, the mixed doubles championship and the women's doubles championship while undergoing chemotherapy. I thought that was pretty good.

Her most difficult questions: I've been asked two really tough questions and they both came from my children. The first one was post-diagnosis when I sat them down and told them. They were eight, eight, six and four. My oldest son, one of the twins, said, "Are you going to die?" I said, "No - dying is not an option." The second time it was the same son. I sat down with my family and said, "There is a new spot of cancer. Mom's going to do things differently this time. I'm going to have a lot of surgery done (a double mastectomy and hysterectomy) and the reason why I want to talk to you guys is I want you to know you can expect [six weeks of bed rest]." We explained the whole process and my son said, "Mom, are you okay with this decision?" I said, "I think it's the best decision for all of us, it'll keep mom healthy. It'll be a tough transition when I'm in the healing process but it's the smartest decision." He said, "Well, if you're okay with it, then I'm okay with it." Coming from a 12 year-old boy, it blew me out of the water.

On the secret to Living in Pink's success: Basically, it's just a network of hard working women, there are 10 on the com-

mittee, with an average of 3.4 children. My friend Laurie brings us up because she has seven, but all of us have an obnoxious amount of children. We're all really hard-working committed women who do our meetings at night when kids are in bed. Margaritas do help."

On her two-decade career detour: A friend of mine worked for State Farm Insurance for about 30 years. I had known him because I waitressed through college to help pay for books. We'd always chat, every time I'd say, "That's not the area I want to go into, I really want to get into sports marketing or journalism." Finally one day I felt so bad about saying no, I said "Okay, I'll meet up." I went to meet his boss and took a test, sat and listened to the options for State Farm agents and I thought, "Well, I don't have a full time position yet, so why don't I just try it?" So I tried it and 20 years later, I'm still trying it.

Conley, who runs over 25 miles a week, believes she naturally has "tons of energy." Bottle it with your other qualities, Michele, and save our kids from our lectures.

When your parents told you to embody gritty determination, embrace optimism and target seemingly impossible goals, they should have pointed to Michele Conley rather than a nearby academic superstar. The State Farm Insurance agent hosted her second annual Living in Pink foundation luncheon to raise money for research on breast cancer, a disease she's been diagnosed with twice. Over lunch at Café Milano, the mom of four narrated her defining struggles and achievements. Here's Conley in her own words - we couldn't say it better.

"The Players," a new multimedia column, is also aired on WTOP radio every other Wednesday at 5:10 p.m. in Bob Madigan's "Man About Town."

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