

# A Driving

Longtime golf commentator Jennifer Mills explains how the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs laps the field in the golf event circuit.

If you are looking for special ingredients that will make your golf event a success, then gather a sexy Hollywood star and a dozen or so of his or her actor and athlete friends; pair them with golfers who spend a hefty chunk for the opportunity to play; offer your guests four days of world-class golf on breathtaking venues nestled in the majestic Carolina mountains; and surround them with southern hospitality and smiles. Finally, mix it all up with a committed and well-funded sponsor who in the end, cooks up a colossal check for charity.

That recipe is probably too elaborate for most, but it's what makes the Nationwide Tour's annual BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs a smashing success. It's a formula that offers event planners food for thought and a solid plan to model an outing after.

Let me start by saying I'm biased. In my opinion, the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs is one of the best run, best attended and ultimately one of the most successful events on the national golf calendar each year. The fact that I'm from the area, have worked with the

PGA Tour for 12 years and have a huge hankering to win the event's celebrity bracket and thus drive off in a sporty little Z-4 might have something to do with my bias. But before you shoot down my credibility, let me back up the claim.

We'll begin with the facts, I am a golf reporter after all. Now in its sixth year, the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs has, during that time, raised three million dollars for local charities, more than any other Nationwide Tour event. Attendance during that span is approximately 200,000, a Tour record. Perhaps



S. Bacz/WireImage.com

The Great One, Wayne Gretzky, scores big with fans.



Al Messerschmidt/WireImage.com

Autograph seekers do well at the BMW Charity Pro-Am.



Chris Condon/PGA TOUR/WireImage.com

One of golf's leading ladies, Mills surveys the situation.

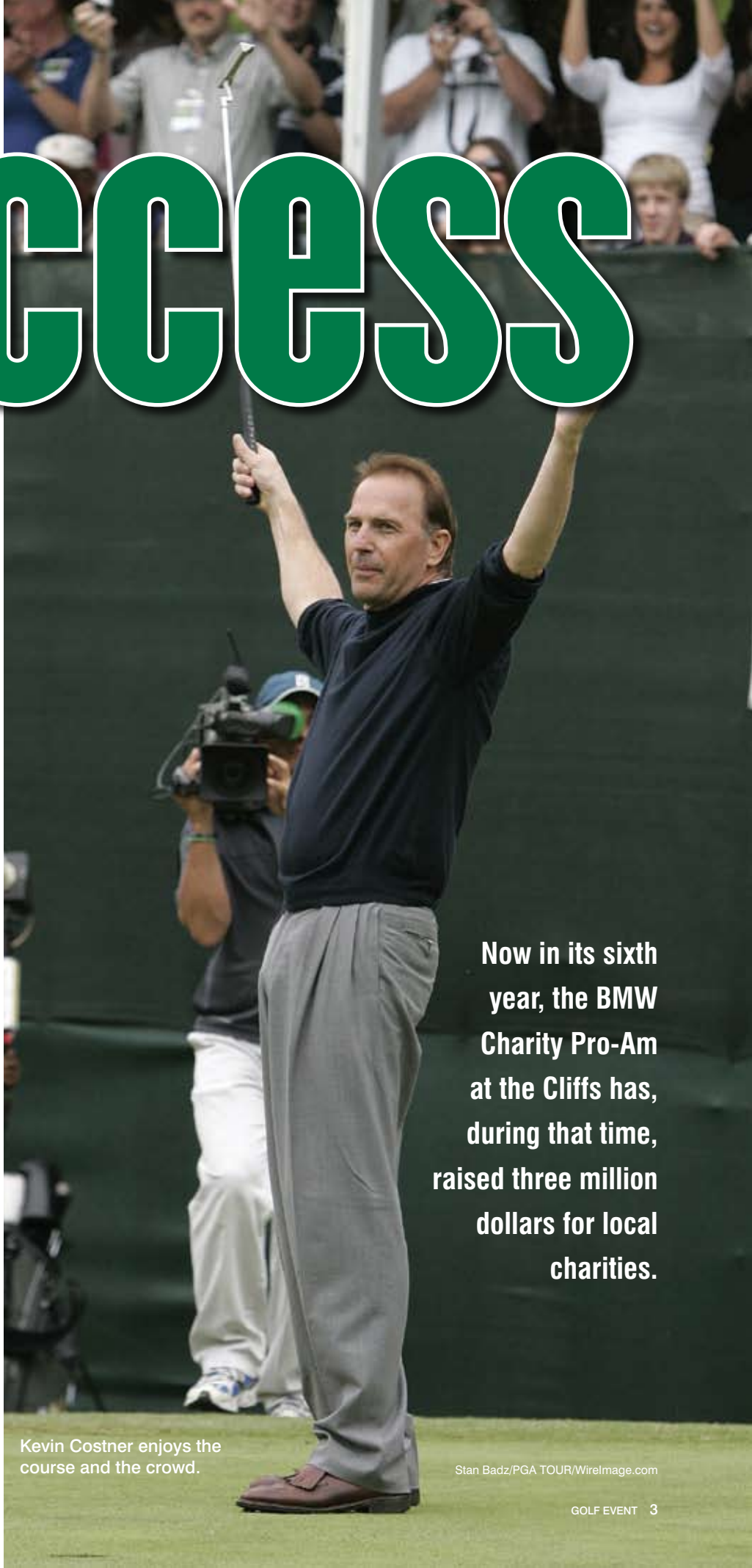
# SUCCESS

most telling, celebrities like Kevin Costner, Catherine Bell, John O'Hurley, Wayne Gretzky and Cheech Marin participate year after year.

## Favorable Ingredients

Successful golf events don't just happen. They need a skilled leader to build and run the event. Tournament Director Darin MacDonald thrives on producing a superlative tournament and reaching goals. "Directing a successful special event for an international company, BMW, and a world-class golf and residential communities company, The Cliffs, requires several key ingredients including small yet vital details, aggressive communication and the involvement of a lot of good people who know what the goal is—having a good time while raising dollars and awareness for charity," he says.

Held annually each May at the Cliffs Communities in the western Carolinas, just outside Greenville, S.C., the event is set against some of Mother Nature's most spectacular scenery. Add to that the creative artistry of expert golf course architects like Jack Nicklaus and Tom Fazio and you have the first ingredient to a successful event, a strong setting. Venue is key.



Kevin Costner enjoys the course and the crowd.

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Stan Badz/PGA TOUR/WireImage.com



S. Badz/WireImage.com

The Cliffs Communities offer a majestic backdrop to the proceedings.

All golfers want to play the best courses, especially courses that are not easily attainable. Do what it takes to secure a top-quality venue for your event. Obviously acquiring a donated property is the way to go, but be aggressive in selecting, and ultimately choosing, the best possible course. Sell the club or course on your event's philan-

thropic efforts if it is a charity event. Or, if you have the money for a top-notch venue, spend it. A good course equals good attendance and more money.

Next, what's the format? The BMW Charity Pro-Am features pro-amateur and celebrity teams of two competing in a best-ball format, much like the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. In the celebrity division, the winning celebrity drives home in a fancy dancy Z-4. (In six years competing, I've finished third twice and second once, to Jack Nicklaus no less! For heaven's sake, I can smell the new leather!) This format works on Tour because there are enough professionals to go around which is likely not the case with a local event. But the more pro involvement you have, the better. People love playing in a group with a professional. Clients are forever hopeful that through a few good tips or osmosis their game will improve.

To make your outing more memorable for your guests, ask one of the local pros to do a short clinic before the event. Then allow a little time for the participants to try out their newly found skills prior to play.

Most non-professional golf events feature a range of talent. Make sure your format suits the level of ability. Average and beginner players will prefer a scramble. More experienced fields should go with a best-ball competition. Do whatever keeps play moving. No one enjoys slow golf and a six-hour

**Be aggressive in selecting, and ultimately choosing, the best possible course.**

round wilts even the most upbeat spirits. So often I see people leave immediately after a long round. The auction after-party hasn't even begun! This is a huge loss of revenue. The head pro at the course can help you choose a format. In order to keep play moving at an enjoyable pace, have your professional explain the 'pick-up' rule where contestants stop once they've reached bogey on their scorecard.

**Don't Be Shy**

For a successful event, it's important to attract, target and promote your



Stan Badz/PGA TOUR/WireImage.com

Philadelphia Eagles' linebacker, Dhani Jones, takes a knee after a good shot.



Al Messerschmidt/WireImage.com

Kevin Costner and his yet-to-be-named band make their debut.

event properly. Who to target and how to promote? While I'd love to ship you a dozen of these cool little BMW convertibles and megaphones to zip around town announcing your event, I can't. (Still trying to win my own, remember?) What I will offer are these suggestions:

- Contact all your local courses and ask for a spot on their locker room bulletin board or web site.
- Negotiate print ads in local papers, community weeklies, church bulletins and company web sites.
- Ask your local television station for commercial time, or to be mentioned by the local sportscaster during his or her broadcast. Star power means more money for your cause. Use it to your advantage.

Highlight the stars playing in your event. Highlight the course if it's a good one. Most importantly highlight the benefactor if it's a charity. You don't ever want to put someone in need on display. From my experience, the most memorable events I've covered were ones in which the kids from say, Make-A-Wish Foundation or the Boys

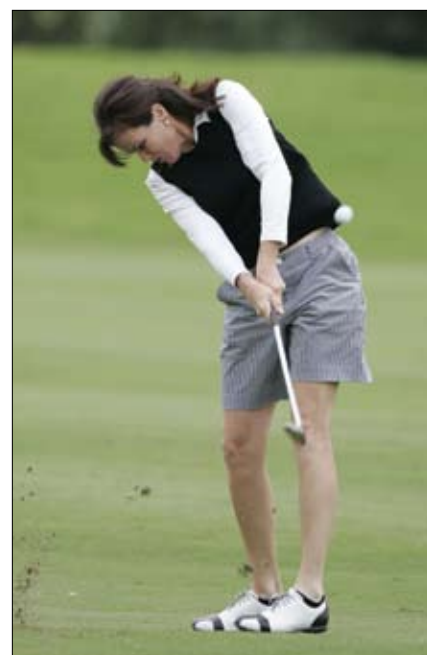
and Girls Club, were on site. They love the opportunity. Bringing your charity to life at the event is so important. It brings direct contact with the attendees. So have the children help at the sign-in table, give out drinks and award prizes. It is a wonderful way to have them share an enjoyable day and make a difference. It will put smiles on faces and have your patrons reaching for their checkbook at day's end.

Scott Beville, senior vice president of sales and marketing at the Cliffs Communities says the event "affords The Cliffs the opportunity to come together with our property owners and the greater community and make a meaningful impact on the lives of those right here in the upstate of South Carolina and the western part of North Carolina. Since the tournament's inception, we have raised millions of dollars that have provided a direct benefit to charities and organizations right here in our own backyard." Twenty-nine charities benefited from this year's event.

### It's About The People

In staffing your event, make sure you have two things: a golf savvy chairper-

son or committee members and ample volunteer help. Having a golfer oversee the event will help you cover crucial details and there are many in golf: course layout, format, number of players, clinic possibilities and competitions within the event such as long drive and closest to the hole.



Stan Badz/PGA TOUR/WireImage.com

A 9 handicap, Mills both talks and plays a good game.

More isn't better in this sport, unless you're talking about volunteers. Make sure the people out front are capable and enthusiastic. Some 1,400 volunteers join the party each year at the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs, eager to put on the best show possible.

When asked what lures him to play the BMW year after year, actor Cheech Marin says, "It's the people. When you come everybody is sociable and nice. They make it really convenient for you. You come to see old friends and play great golf courses. That's why I keep coming back."

*Tin Cup's* Kevin Costner is a huge golf fan. So appreciative of what the volunteers have contributed at the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs, he made a unique thank-you gesture this year. Costner and his new, yet to be named, band made its first public appearance at the Cliff's Valley Course after Saturday's third round. The actor/director and now singer went straight from the course to the stage where he admitted being a little nervous performing for the first time in public. "We didn't have a chance to do a sound check, but I didn't have a chance to check my putting either," he joked. A Springsteen-inspired rock concert followed to the de-

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Longtime actor and golfer Cheech Marin says the "people" are what draw him to the Carolinas each year.

light of the hard-working, enthusiastic crowd.

Celebrities and big names will give your event crucial buzz and help create more media exposure. Through personal contacts, invite local celebrities—news or sports anchors, government officials, professional athletes or actors. Perhaps the club will offer a few comp rounds to these stars at a later date as a means of enticing them to play in your event. Suggest to the local television personalities a heartwarming story angle, perhaps one of the kids can help caddie that day, or the sports reporter could caddie for a kid. Touch heartstrings and attendees will not only be back the next year, but they'll talk it up and bring friends.

There are numerous ways to be creative the day of your event. Little things make a tournament memorable. At the BMW event, replicas of the cars are used as the tee markers on each hole, a small touch that gets noticed. Consider photo displays from the charity, appropriate signage, product samples or unique refreshments—there are many options and 18 opportunities.

Details are vital at any event. Involve your entire staff in gathering ideas. Don't be surprised when some of the most creative notions come from an unsuspecting source. "Every detail is considered through the eyes of our sponsors, celebrities, Nationwide Tour Pros and spectators," says Justine Allen, event/communications manager and charity liaison for the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs. "Will this be one of the most enjoyable and memorable experiences of their lifetime? If so, then we've done a good job," Allen adds.

When your event is over, to borrow a Yogi-ism, 'it ain't over.' A regrouping of the troops to discuss what worked and what didn't is essential. The best player on the planet, Tiger Woods, regularly heads from the 18th green after a round to the practice range. Surrounded by his loyal team, caddie Steve Williams and swing guru Hank Haney, Woods and company assess the round and work on necessary changes. If Tiger Woods thinks a post-op is necessary, it's pretty safe to say that formula works. Doing it while the event and



Chris Condon/PGA TOUR/WireImage.com

Even the BMW tee markers drive the point home.

proceedings are fresh, is crucial. I'm surprised by how many events have the same glitches year after year. Small and big problems can be fixed with proper communication.

At any level, choosing the right venue and proper format, creative promotion, enthusiastic and capable staffing, media buzz through celebrity involvement and well-placed stories, special day-of touches and honest, post-op breakdowns will help insure that your event has the best chance for success.

It doesn't take a superstar celebrity like Kevin Costner, world-class venues like the Cliffs Communities or the drive of a mega automotive company like BMW to insure your event will be a hit. Although yes, it sure helps. In golf, the old adage is "drive for show, putt for dough." At the BMW Charity Pro-Am at the Cliffs, they drive for show and play for dough—lots of it, which makes the Tour and charities across the upstate of South Carolina very happy. Now, if I can just win that Z-4. ☺

*Jennifer Mills is currently working on USA Network and PGA Tour Sunday. She is available as a host, emcee or player at corporate events and can be booked through Tour Talent at [www.tourtalent.com](http://www.tourtalent.com).*

## Key Takeaways

- 1.** Have a goal and make sure everyone—leaders, staff and volunteers—know what it is, so it can be met.
- 2.** Venue is key. Do what you can to secure a top-quality course.
- 3.** Select a format that fits your players and keeps play moving.
- 4.** If you can have pro involvement—get it and promote it.
- 5.** If your event is for a charity, bring the charity to life at the event.
- 6.** Have ample volunteer help.
- 7.** Conduct a post-event assessment to make the next outing even more successful.