For Tampa Bay Rays star Evan Longoria, helping Moffitt is an easy call.
“Hope is very strong. So if people have hope, they can battle through anything.”
THE DETAILS OF EVAN LONGORIA’S FIRST VISIT TO MOFFITT CANCER CENTER ARE FUZZY NOW, YEARS LATER, BUT THE IMPACT ON THE TAMPA BAY RAYS ALL-STAR THIRD BASEMAN REMAINS CRYSTAL CLEAR.

Longoria met several patients that day, but the one that stood out was a young man who had been actively pursuing a baseball career until being diagnosed.

Longoria didn’t catch his name, or recall his specific type of cancer, but he will always remember how he felt.

“At that moment, it was just kind of like, man ...” Longoria says. “I guess when it’s someone that does something that you do, whether they’re 15 years old or 50 years old, it just feels like it’s a lot closer to you.”

“It struck me pretty deep. It hit me pretty hard to see that.”

So Longoria joined the fight, lending his name, and his time, to help several Moffitt causes.

And while some athletes and celebrities may ask why they should contribute, Longoria saw the question as, why not?

“I think it’s kind of doubly important for me,” he says. “Not only is Moffitt a world-class facility with a world-class staff, but they are right in our backyard. So it’s one thing to be part of an organization like that wherever they are, but to have that sort of facility right where we live makes it a real easy decision for me to be a part of it.”
LONGORIA RAPS ON A WOOD PANEL IN THE RAYS clubhouse when acknowledging how fortunate he is to say that his family has thus far been cancer-free, one of his many blessings he is well aware of.

Raised by working-class parents in Southern California, Longoria was just another kid playing baseball – not even drafted out of high school – before blossoming into a future major-leaguer at Rio Hondo Community College and then Long Beach State University.

Under new management, the then-struggling Devil Rays made him their first-round pick in the 2006 draft, and the relationship has been quite a hit: a mutually beneficial arrangement that has paid off handsomely for both sides.

The Rays, as they rebranded to in 2008, have become one of baseball's most successful teams with Longoria as the centerpiece of their lineup, making four playoff appearances in the six years since.

And Longoria has become one of the game’s top players as well as the face of their franchise, signing a long-term contract that guarantees him $100 million, earning three selections to the All-Star team, winning two Gold Gloves for fielding excellence and appearing in several national television commercials.

Life, obviously, is good. He has a stunning fiancée, model Jaime Edmondson, with plans for a January 2016 wedding, and a beautiful daughter, Elle, who turned one in February and keeps him plenty busy when he is not at the field.

Plus, he is a part-owner, and main menu planner, for a recently opened restaurant/sports boutique lounge in Tampa: Ducky’s.

With all that going on over the grind of a 162-game baseball season (after six weeks of spring training, and, he hopes, before a month of playoffs), Longoria still finds time to help Moffitt causes in various ways.

He participated in his second Miles for Moffitt event in early May, made numerous appearances, donated hitting lessons and other items for the annual Magnolia Ball and made public service announcements in support of Moffitt.

“It’s been great,” he says. “I think I’m in a position where I’m able to make an impact. It’s a responsibility. It’s something that is needed, and I enjoy being a part of organizations like this.”

The Miles for Moffitt event was particularly touching, Longoria says, because of the chance to meet both survivors and patients.

“Hopefully it was uplifting for the people that were there,” he says.

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Through his involvement with Moffitt and other charitable causes and appearances he has made around the Tampa Bay area, Longoria has met cancer patients of all ages. He is frank to admit that the younger ones can be the toughest for him, though he tends to end up finding the experience rewarding.

“We deal with little things every day that sometimes get blown out of proportion, whereas these kids are dealing with very serious life-threatening diseases and they live every day like it’s a normal day and they’re having fun and just enjoying being kids,” Longoria says.

“If there’s anything good you can take out of the experience, it’s that those kids don’t really quite understand what they’re going through, and I think the fact that they don’t gives them this sort of tremendously positive outlook on life.

“And I think that’s something we all can, and that I, take out of it.”

EVERYONE, UNFORTUNATELY, KNOWS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS SOMEONE DEALING WITH CANCER ISSUES.

For Longoria, his first real experience came in 2009 when a friend of a friend was diagnosed with cervical cancer and was being treated at Moffitt.

“It’s something you never want to hear about someone you care about,” Longoria says. “It took an emotional toll on her and on me. It’s hard to watch someone go through that. It opened my eyes to the reality of life.”

It was also what got Longoria involved in helping Moffitt, something he now says “was an easy decision” to make based on its reputation as a world-class facility.

And it also taught him that giving of himself – even more than giving of his money – was how to make the biggest difference in the fight.

“I don’t think money is the thing,” Longoria says. “Time is the most important thing.”

During the offseason, Longoria read the Simon Sinek book, Leaders Eat Last, and was struck by some of the concepts on team success as the result of individual sacrifice by those in charge. He shared those with Rays manager Joe Maddon, and the book title has become something of a theme for the Rays this season.

And in a way, those same thoughts are the way Longoria looks at the opportunity to help Moffitt.

“It kind of goes back to the Leaders Eat Last book a little bit, in that people you’re around that feel drawn to you for whatever reason, or look at you as a role model, or as a person that has an impact in the community, whether it’s me or anybody else, the most important thing is time,” he says. “Because people value their time more than anything.”

And that is how he tries to have the biggest impact.

“When you take time to do a fundraiser or go spend time with somebody in the hospital or go to somebody’s house, whether it’s a family member or the actual person, it seems to me, and, I believe, to pretty much everybody else, as a more significant gesture than just penning a check and sending it in. That’s just more important.”

In addition to the help he provides, Longoria encourages others to join the cause and help Moffitt help fight cancer.

“I think it’s important for everyone to get involved however they can.”

“I think it’s important for everyone to get involved however they can,” he says. “The more we have supporting, the better chance we have of a better outcome.”

Whether it’s giving his time, his money or his name, Longoria is pleased to do what he can to help in the fight, no matter what the currency.

“Hope is very strong,” he says. “So if people have hope, they can battle through anything.” 🏀