Dad's penalty marathon challenge for charity that kept him close to son's hospital bedside

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A Rotherham dad and his childhood friend are taking on a marathon football challenge to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust to thank the charity for supporting his family while his son was in hospital.

Andy Watson will be attempting to take 1,000 penalty kicks in 12 hours against his childhood friend, Jake Lee, to raise £3,000 for a charity which keeps families together when a child is seriously ill in hospital by giving them a place to stay.

When Andy's son, Eric, was born doctors suspected there was a blockage in his bowel and at just a few hours old he was transferred to Sheffield Children's Hospital for tests – which thankfully came back clear. Despite not needing surgery, Eric was struggling to feed and therefore remained at the specialist hospital for four days until he was well enough to go home. His parents however were never far away as they were being supported at The Sick Children's Trust's 'Home from Home' Magnolia House, in Sheffield. **Andy, 34, a Steelworker at AMG, said:**

"Eric was just a few hours old when he was taken to Sheffield Children's Hospital – it would've been a long distance for us to travel back and forth for four days to see him if it wasn't for The Sick Children's Trust.

"It was a really stressful time which was made a lot easier because I was able to stay close to Eric and be with him at a moment's notice. My fiancé, Rebecca, could only come at visiting times while she recovered from a caesarean, but she brought our other son Zack, who was two at the time, with her so we could all be together. Knowing that Eric always had someone nearby was a great comfort to us both.

"When I gave the keys back, I promised the house staff that I would fundraise for The Sick Children's Trust as I know how much they rely on donations and I really wanted to give something back after they helped us so much. I spoke to Jake, who was very supportive of joining in with the fundraising, and we came up with this football challenge, which will take place on 12 October at Barker's Park in Rotherham."

Attempting to take the vast number of penalties won't be the only test that Andy will be facing as Jake, who is a member of the goalkeepers union, will be in-between the sticks throughout the challenge trying to prevent him scoring as many goals as possible. While the pair might be old friends, Andy knows neither of them will hold back. **Andy added:**

"As much as I don't want to admit it, Jake's actually a pretty good goalkeeper. He's played in other charity football matches and last year he did manage to save a penalty at Hillsborough, so it won't be easy. We've always been very competitive with each other so neither of us will be giving the other a chance. That's why I'm looking forward to the challenge!

"Jake will be fine with the 12 hour distance as well as he's always been one of those guys who's very determined and if he decides to do something he fully commits. Having twin boys himself last year, he has been very sympathetic and supportive of our situation and he got fully on board as soon as I suggested doing this fundraiser with him."

It costs The Sick Children's Trust £30 a night to support a family with a room at one of its 'Homes from Home' with the charity relying completely on the generosity of the public's donations. **Ann Wyatt, Magnolia House Manager, said**:

"We wish Andy and Jake all the best with their mammoth penalty challenge and we are extremely grateful for the funds they will be raising. Magnolia House is one of ten 'Homes from Home' that The Sick Children's Trust runs across the country, supporting families so that they can remain close to their seriously ill child's hospital beside. This money will allow us to continue to be there for more families, ensuring no child has to face hospital alone."

More information about Andy's challenge can be found on his just giving page https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/andy-watson4500.

For further information about The Sick Children's Trust, please visit sickchildrenstrust.org

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