

If You Were Blind

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What would happen to your golf game if you were suddenly stricken with blindness?

Amazing as it may seem, it wouldn't make much difference if you happen to be a 100-shooter. After a year or two of readjustment, you'd still go around in about the same figure. On the other hand (and don't ask me why) if you are in the 70s now, you'd probably be trying to break 100 if you were blinded. In either case, it is heartening to know that the golfer who loses his sight need not give up the game—he can still have a lot of fun.

I reached the above conclusions after witnessing the most inspiring sports event I ever attended — the American Blind Golfers Championship Tournament held at my club, the Augusta Country Club, Augusta, Maine, last summer.

The emergence of golf as a sport for the blind has come about during the past few years because of the indomitable spirit of many sightless men who have refused to let their handicap lick them. Most are veterans of the past two wars. Those who played at Augusta came from all sections of the United States and Canada and have been leaders in the effort to stimulate competitive sports interest among others similarly afflicted.

Curiously enough, the blind golfers seemed better adjusted to life than many who watched them play. No doubt the fires they have gone through have left them triumphant over the self-doubt and self-pity to which many of us are prey.

Thus, the tournament was a happy, carefree, extremely warm affair. Players and spectators had a whale of a good time together, even though the players fought tooth and nail, although unsuccessfully, to dethrone Charlie Boswell, of Birmingham, Ala., winner of all four tournaments the blind golfers have played. The previous events were held

in California, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

System of Play

How do you play golf when blind? Well, each golfer has a coach, preferably someone who knows him well and has played golf with him. On the tee, the coach hands his golfer the club, tees up the ball and places the clubhead back of it, aiming it in the process. The golfer then simply goes through with his swing as sighted golfers would. From then on the coach merely hands the golfer the club he needs and proceeds as on the drive.

Let us say that for 150 yards the blind golfer needs a No. 5 iron. Under normal conditions, that's what he'll always use. He'll never hit a hard 6 or a soft 4—he swings every club the same way, which is, of course, a secret of good golf.

On the green the coach will lead the golfer from where his ball lies to the hole and then back again. When the golfer is getting ready to putt, the coach will often tap the cup with a club so the golfer will be aided in his direction by the sound.

Now let us suppose he misses the putt by three or four feet. In that case, he will get down on his knees and run his hand from ball to cup, thus, by feel, getting direction and desired speed of the putt firmly fixed in his mind. Then the coach lines up the putter and, at that distance, the blind golfer rarely misses, far more rarely than the rest of us do.

Actually, the blind golfer has certain psychological advantages. He never "looks up." He doesn't vary the speed of his swing. He isn't tempted to use the wrong club. Not being able to see the hazards, he doesn't tighten up as many of us do when confronted with a difficult shot.

There is more than one seeming par-

At the Blind Golf Tournament



Maine Development Commission Photo

Charlie Boswell, winner of all four of the Blind Golf Tournaments held so far, driving off at Augusta, Me., Country Club as Francis Ouimet, former Open and Amateur Champion, awaits his turn, blindfolded (left center). They met in a one-hole exhibition at conclusion of last year's Blind Tournament. Ouimet took ten strokes to Boswell's five.

adox to blind golf. Why, for instance should a player who never played until after he lost his sight play as well as the person who was a good player previous to his accident? An example is Charlie Boswell, present champion, who never swung a club until he became sightless, and Bill Gilman, runner-up, who played exceedingly well before he was maimed in the war.

Quick Learners

Here is another curious thing. I have studied the case histories of those who competed and I'm willing to wager that, all other things being equal, a blind beginner will break 100 before a beginner with sight will do so. Why? I can't answer that.

At present most of the blind boys have difficulty in doing much better than 100, but most of them have been playing only a few years. I am of the opinion that eventually some blind men will be playing in the 80s, which, of course, would be truly remarkable. As a matter

of fact, their extraordinary difficulty in the rough and in bunkers is about all that is keeping them from low scoring right now. In those phases of the game, understandably enough, they need improvement most.

I have covered a great many tournaments and seen many leading players. However, I have never seen any shots more remarkable than some pulled off by the blind players. With experience will come the ability to make them more often, with a resultant lowering of scores.

Citizens of Maine, aided by a few Massachusetts sportsmen, financed the Augusta tournament. All expenses of the players, their wives and their coaches were paid from the time they left home until they returned. It was Maine's way of honoring its own Bill Gilman and, of course, his fellow blind golfers. And Maine felt well repaid, because it was a delight for all of us to associate with these gallant men who have met adversity and beaten it.