

Accommodating Golfers with Disabilities

Opportunities are available within golf for individuals with disabilities.

BY MARK FRACE

Tom Watson, a five-time British Open champion, who has seen the most challenging of links conditions, said, “We’re not on a fair course,” when referring to Carnoustie during the 1999 British Open. Thirty percent of the field failed to break 80 in the first two rounds. How hard is Carnoustie? I’ve been to “Carnasty,” and while the best players in the world thought it was difficult, imagine playing it with one arm and lacking full mobility of one of your legs. The high rough, strong winds, and rain of Carnoustie’s challenging links were the setting for my first experience in the Society of One-Armed Golfers’ World Championship. My most successful finish in the championship was my eighth-place finish in 1997, but the most fulfilling was three years earlier at Carnoustie.

I began working with the USGA in 1998 as part of the second class of Fellows to participate in the USGA Fellowship in Leadership and Service Program. I have always had a passion for bringing the game of golf to all individuals with disabilities. Currently, I serve as the coordinator for the USGA Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities with the USGA Foundation office in Colorado Springs.

Founded in 1965, the USGA Foundation serves as the philanthropic arm of the organization. In November 1997, the USGA Executive Committee announced its 10-year, \$50-million “For the Good of the Game” Grants Initiative.



Mark Frace, USGA Foundation

Grants go towards junior golf programs for economically disadvantaged youth, caddie, and occupational programs, affordable and accessible facility development, and golf programs for individuals with disabilities. Last year, the Foundation awarded 290 grants totaling more than \$6.1 million. Since 1997, more than \$27 million has been awarded in 50 states and the District of Columbia. Over the past four years, the Foundation has granted more than \$1.5 million toward golf programs for individuals with disabilities, and has participated and helped fund each of the six National Forums on Accessible Golf.

The USGA investment has not been limited to programming; we also have collaborated in the name of research. In 1997, with the GCSAA and PGA of America, a study funded at Rutgers University tested the impact of carts and wheelchairs used by people with mobility impairments on a number of different golf surfaces. The study concluded that modern equipment frequently used by people with mobility impairments did not do any unorthodox damage to any of the surfaces. This in-depth study is available through the USGA Green Section.

In 2000, the USGA took its biggest step, launching the USGA Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities. The goal is to distribute information to any golfer with a disability who is interested in learning about and playing the game, as well as reaching those

in the golf community who may not know about the opportunities within the game. The Resource Center reaches out through a website (<http://golfcenterdisabilities.usga.org>), magazine articles, and speaking engagements. Overall, the website contains information on golf programs, equipment (e.g., single-rider golf carts and adaptive clubs), attending USGA Championships, articles, accessibility topics, and modified Rules of Golf. Future plans include a searchable database of golf courses that are accessible to golfers with disabilities. In the end, the USGA wants the Center to be the most comprehensive place to create awareness for golf within the community of individuals with disabilities.

One of the first Resource Center projects was the production of a booklet geared toward making all golf facilities more welcoming to individuals with disabilities. *From Bag Drop to 19th Hole*, developed by Gary Robb (Executive

Director, National Center on Accessibility), was published in 2000 through a USGA grant. This booklet contains information on the use of adaptive equipment on the course and making the course as accessible as possible. This has been distributed to 10,000 USGA member clubs and courses and all the National Golf Course Owners Association members. It is available free of charge from the USGA Foundation office.

Other exciting and new projects within the golf industry are striving to improve accessibility to the game. For example, six National Forums on Accessible Golf have been held since the early 1990s. The first Forum focused on clarifying the ADA and how it applies to golf. The second, third, and fourth focused on architectural and program access. The fifth focused on communi-

cation topics. The sixth Forum created national educational strategies that will make the game more accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, convincing the medical and rehabilitative communities to use golf more as a rehabilitative tool.

Another exciting development is the formation of a National Alliance for Accessible Golf. Leaders from the golf industry and representatives of organizations serving people with disabilities and golfers with disabilities formed the National Alliance for Accessible Golf in July 2001. The Alliance is facilitated by the National Center on Accessibility at Indiana University, the University of Utah, and Clemson University.

The purpose of the Alliance is to develop solutions for making the game of golf accessible to persons with disabilities, such as:

- Increase understanding of the benefits of golf among persons with disabilities.



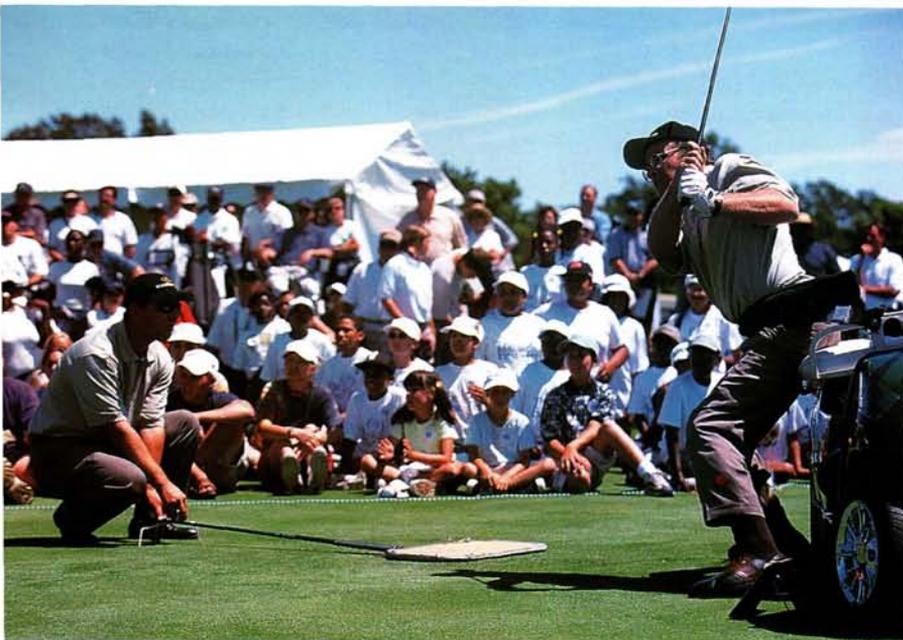
- Increase the golf industry's awareness of the benefits of serving persons with disabilities.
- Advance models and resources for persons with disabilities to learn the game of golf.
- Increase awareness of the needs of golfers with disabilities among golf course owners and operators, teaching professionals, and related personnel.
- Advance scientific understanding of the benefits of golf for persons with disabilities.
- Assist the golf industry in resolving issues related to expanding services to persons with disabilities.
- Assembling and reviewing technical information for golf course managers, rehabilitation and recreation professionals, and golf professionals that leads to improved inclusive services.

An important step for golf courses is to develop an accessible route for mobility equipment to access the golf course.

The USGA Resource Center strives to distribute information to any golfer with a disability who is interested in playing the game.



The National Alliance for Accessible Golf works to increase the golf industry's awareness of meeting the needs of persons with disabilities.



The Leadership Council for the Alliance identified four high-priority projects. These projects include the creation of a Tool Kit for golf course owners and operators, LPGA-PGA curriculum for instruction and training, continued expansion and enhancement of the USGA Resource Center website, and the development of a model program called Project GAIN that welcomes individuals with disabilities to the game and maximizes the opportunities for continued participation. A two-year grant from the USGA totaling \$156,000 was awarded to support Project GAIN.

Another very important initiative is the development of the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. The U.S. Access Board establishes the minimum guidelines, and in 2000 the Board distributed the draft of the final Rule. It is expected this will be reviewed in March 2002 and will become official. The Rule only applies to newly constructed golf courses and any alterations that might be made through renovation or remodeling.

Specific guidelines to golf courses are as follows:

- An accessible route connecting the bag drop areas, accessible teeing ground, weather shelters, and putting greens must be provided.
- Teeing ground: Where one or two are provided, at least one must be accessible. Where three or more are provided, at least two must be accessible.
- Driving ranges, practice tees, putting greens, weather shelters: Designed and constructed so that a golf cart can enter and maneuver easily. Weather shelters must be minimum 60 inches by 96 inches and designed so a golf cart can enter and exit. Putting greens must be designed and constructed so that a golf cart can enter and exit.

In the end, we must do all we can to capitalize on the unique nature of a game that provides the ultimate in integrated recreation for people. Ultimately, it is about the magic of watching people do something that was outside of their personal realm of possibility and the impact that it has on their lives and the lives of others.

MARK FRACE is coordinator for the USGA Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities. The Resource Center can be reached at <http://golfcenterdisabilities.usga.org>.