

Disability *Aside*

Amputees, paraplegics and others with physical impairments want to play golf, and they say that golf courses will only benefit by making them feel more welcome



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

The longer Mike Reeder sits in a golf car and waits for his turn to tee off on the first hole, the larger a crowd grows to watch him. By the time it's Reeder's turn to hit, the gathering has grown to about 400 people.

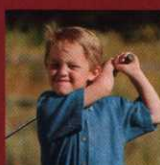
They don't want to miss this.

Reeder glances at the throng assembled around the tee box. He takes his spot on the well-manicured grass and positions himself for his shot. The crowd hushes as Reeder eyes his target. He sways his muscular arms back and takes a graceful swing.

Thwack!
Thwack!
Thwack!

Continued on page 30

[ABOUT THIS SERIES] "Growing the Game," a four-part series that will appear in *Golfdom* throughout this year, will focus on how the golf industry can attract more new players and create more rounds from four distinct groups: **disabled people; women; children; and minorities**, including African-Americans and Hispanics. *Golfdom* will speak with representatives from people representing each of these segments to get their views on what the golf industry needs to do to attract more players from their segments. Then we'll speak with golf industry representatives to see what the industry is doing and what plans it has to grow the game within these segments.



◀ Part two of the series, "Attracting More Minority Golfers," runs in May.



Kellie Valentine-Andrews hasn't let a disability stop her from teeing it up.

Continued from page 29

The golf ball glides like a soaring seagull and lands in the middle of the fairway, about 225 yards from the tee. The crowd roars its approval, as if Tiger Woods had hit the shot.

Reeder takes it all in. And then, as the crowd begins to quiet, he hears a voice from above the others shout, "Man, *he* hits it better than I do!"

Reeder, a 10 handicap, chuckles to himself. The remark doesn't bother him. In his 20 years of playing golf while sitting in a wheelchair — Reeder is an amputee who lost his legs in a booby trap during the Vietnam War — the 57-year-old has heard it all.

But it rankles Reeder that able-bodied people assume that disabled people — from amputees to paraplegics to others physically impaired by hip injuries, strokes and other afflictions — can't be

decent golfers and are bound to spray their balls all over a course while taking six hours to complete 18 holes.

It's not just the golfers who maintain these opinions, disabled people say, noting that golf course employees — from owners to general managers to pros to superintendents — haven't exactly rolled out the welcome mat for them. Golfers with disabilities say they don't feel accepted at some golf courses, despite the fact that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires golf courses "to provide goods and services to people with disabilities on an equal basis with the rest of the general public."

"A lot of people might refer to us as gimps or cripples and ask what the hell we're doing out there," says Bob Wilson, a below-knee amputee and executive director of the National Amputee Golf Association.

Continued on page 32

GENUINE GRANITE YARDAGE PLATES

ONLY **\$19.99** EACH

BIGGER IS BETTER...
6" x 10" x 2"

ASK HOW TO RECEIVE FREE SHIPPING.

150

100

TTG Custom Signage
Where legends begin.

ARCHITECTURAL BRONZE, ALUMINUM & GRANITE CUSTOM SIGN SOLUTIONS.

CALL: 1-800-360-9959

WWW.TTGCS.COM

Have you received editorial coverage in *Golfdom*?

When your company is featured in *Golfdom*, expecting your customers to read your story isn't enough... you need Reprints.



800-290-5460 ext. 100
golfdom@reprintbuyer.com

RMS is the authorized provider of custom Reprints, Eprints and NXTPrints for *Golfdom* magazine.

A Matter of Semantics

So your golf facility is reaching out to golfers with disabilities in hopes that more of them will come to your course to play. Just make sure you and your staff know how to talk to them when they come to play. When referring to disabled golfers, there are words to use and words not to use. It's OK to refer to them as golfers with disabilities, golfers who use wheelchairs or golfers who are blind. But never refer to them as victims, crippled, afflicted or deaf and dumb.

Source: The USGA's Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities

Marty Ebel says more golf courses need to supply single-rider cars.

Continued from page 30

But Wilson stresses that golf courses can only boost their businesses and rounds nationally if they make disabled players feel welcome at their courses. If more disabled people play golf, it doesn't take a Wharton grad to surmise that more courses will increase their rounds and revenue. And it doesn't take a sociologist to conclude that golf courses will improve their images in their respective communities for making their facilities accessible to the disabled.

Gary Robb, executive director of the National Center on Accessibility and president of the National Alliance for Accessible Golf, says golf courses haven't seen a large demand from people with disabilities to play golf because most of them don't view the sport as a viable activity for them. But Robb believes golf courses should be proactive to attract more golfers with disabilities.

"[Golf courses] should let people

they are welcome and [their] staffs should stand ready to assist [them] and facilitate a positive golf experience for [them]," he adds.

Mike Tinkey, deputy executive director for the National Golf Course Owners Association of America (NGCOA), says his organization's members can do a better job of serving the disabled. Tinkey says the NGCOA needs to find the courses that are doing a commendable job of attracting disabled golfers and promote their initiatives to other courses.

"Some [courses] do an outstanding job [of promoting golf to the disabled]," Tinkey says. "But for others, it's just not on their radar screens."

About 7 million people use mobility devices such as canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs and scooters, according to the National Center on Accessibility (NCA). About 700,000 of those peo-

with disabilities know that

ple are golfers or are interested in playing golf. Also, with a large segment of the population getting older — the first wave of baby boomers turns 60 this year — there will be an increase in disabled people in coming years. It's estimated the population of senior golfers will increase by 30 percent by 2010.

The United States Golf Association's (USGA) Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities says golf is one of the few sports that can incorporate individuals with disabilities easily. The center estimates the game would gain more than 5 million new players if 12 percent of individuals with disabilities took it up.

Golf courses need to promote their facilities to disabled people, Tinkey says. He stresses that courses should work with hospitals and rehabilitation centers to let disabled people know they are welcome there to play.

Continued on page 34



Gaining Access

In order to make your golf facility fully accessible, the following suggestions are recommended:

- ▶ A minimum pathway (at least 48 inches wide) is needed to connect all areas within the boundaries of the entire golf facility, including the bag drop, parking lot, clubhouse or pro shop, practice facilities and golf course.
- ▶ At least two teeing grounds on each hole (where at least two tees are provided) are needed to allow golf car passage so that an individual with a disability can enter and exit. The area should be a minimum of 10 feet by 10 feet and on a level surface.
- ▶ Where temporary or permanent barriers are used along cart paths, an opening

60 inches wide should be provided every 75 yards to allow golf carts or assistive devices to enter the fairway.

- ▶ At each green, allow space for golf cars to approach, enter and exit.
- ▶ Accessibility to bunkers is not required. Whenever possible, however, easy ingress/egress points should be considered.
- ▶ All amenities such as restrooms and snack bars should be accessible.
- ▶ Weather shelters should be 60 inches by 96 inches in order to allow a golf car to enter and exit.

▶ Make parking accessible to a golf course's bag drop, golf shop, practice facility and restaurant.

- ▶ Ensure that a wheeled device can access all areas of a golf shop.
- ▶ Consider lowering a counter section in the pro shop to make it more accessible for someone in a wheelchair.
- ▶ At least 5 percent of practice stations should be accessible to individuals who use assistive mobility devices.

Source: The USGA's Resource Center for Individuals with Disabilities

Continued from page 32

That pleases Reeder, who says disabled players just want to be treated like typical golfers.

"We drink beer, eat sandwiches and buy golf shirts just like anybody else," says Reeder, who has worked as a ranger for 17 years at Forest Crossing Golf Course in Franklin, Tenn.

The stereotypes need to stop if golf courses want to attract more disabled players. A paraplegic isn't going to play a course if he thinks the people at that course, from its employees and players, deem him or her as a slow player who will hold up other golfers.

Kim Moore, who has a prosthetic leg,

knows what that label feels like. Moore has a low handicap, but that doesn't stop people from presuming she must be a lousy golfer because of her disability. The fact that the 24-year-old Moore is a woman makes her situation even worse.

"I'm sure that when I step up to the first tee, some people say, 'Here's a lady with a prosthetic leg and now I have to play behind her,'" Moore says. "Then they see me hit the first shot and they're like, 'Holy cow.'"

Marty Ebel, an above-knee amputee who uses a single-rider golf car to transport him around golf courses, says he's been made to feel like an outsider on some golf courses.

"I used to have to beg and cajole to

get out on a course to play," says Ebel, who lost his legs in a front-loader accident in 1984.

Tinkey says the slow-play tag on disabled people is unfair. "Nothing points to them [playing slow]," he adds, noting that it's NGCOA's role to help dispel the myth.

If golf courses want to attract more disabled players, they must provide proper assistance for disabled people to get around. That means allowing single-rider cars on the courses and allowing the cars to be driven on greens, Ebel says.

Twenty years ago, when he drove a three-wheel scooter-type vehicle with wide treads, Ebel understood why superintendents were worried that it could damage a course's greens. But the newer

cars, with their sleeker designs and improved engineering, won't damage greens, Ebel says. He also notes that many superintendents realize that today's single-rider cars are more turf-friendly than they were many years ago.

"They recognize that a triplex mower on the green is going to exert a lot more pressure on a green than a single-rider golf car," Ebel adds.

The U.S. Department of Justice is now considering a mandate to require every golf course in America to provide one or two accessible golf cars at a potential cost of \$6,000 to \$12,000 per golf course.

Golf courses also need to make exceptions to certain rules to accommodate disabled golfers if they want to attract more of them. For instance, a golfer who has prosthetic legs might have to play with hard spikes to achieve better balance when walking on slopes and slippery areas.

Wilson says he can't play in soft spikes because they're too slippery. Unfortunately, Wilson says he has encountered golf course personnel who are skeptical of letting him play in hard spikes.

"You would think they'd understand," Wilson says. "But some think if they let me on with hard spikes, then they'll also have to let the Hell's Angels come out with their hobnail boots on."

Despite their negative stories, golfers with disabilities say they have had positive experiences on courses. Several disabled players gave high marks to Bethpage State Park, which hosted the 57th National Amputee Golf Championship last summer, for making the course easy for them to navigate and for treating them with respect.


Reeder says the Bethpage staff went out of its way to accommodate players. "Everybody was falling all over themselves to help us," he adds.

Dave Catalano, director of Bethpage State Park, says the course's staff will do anything possible to accommodate disabled golfers at any time.


At Bethpage and other courses and clubs, golf cars are not allowed in parking lots because the lots are considered public roadways. During the tournament, Catalano says Bethpage officials had to alter traffic patterns to allow some golf cars in the parking lot to transport disabled golfers who had walking impairments.

It wasn't a big deal, Catalano says, even for a three-day tournament. And if one disabled player ever needed similar assistance, Catalano says Bethpage would make every provision possible to get that person transported to the course so he or she could play. The disabled person only needs to contact the course prior to his or her round to make the arrangement, Catalano says.


Continued on page 36




Results through design; not weight



Officially Licensed Product of the PGA TOUR




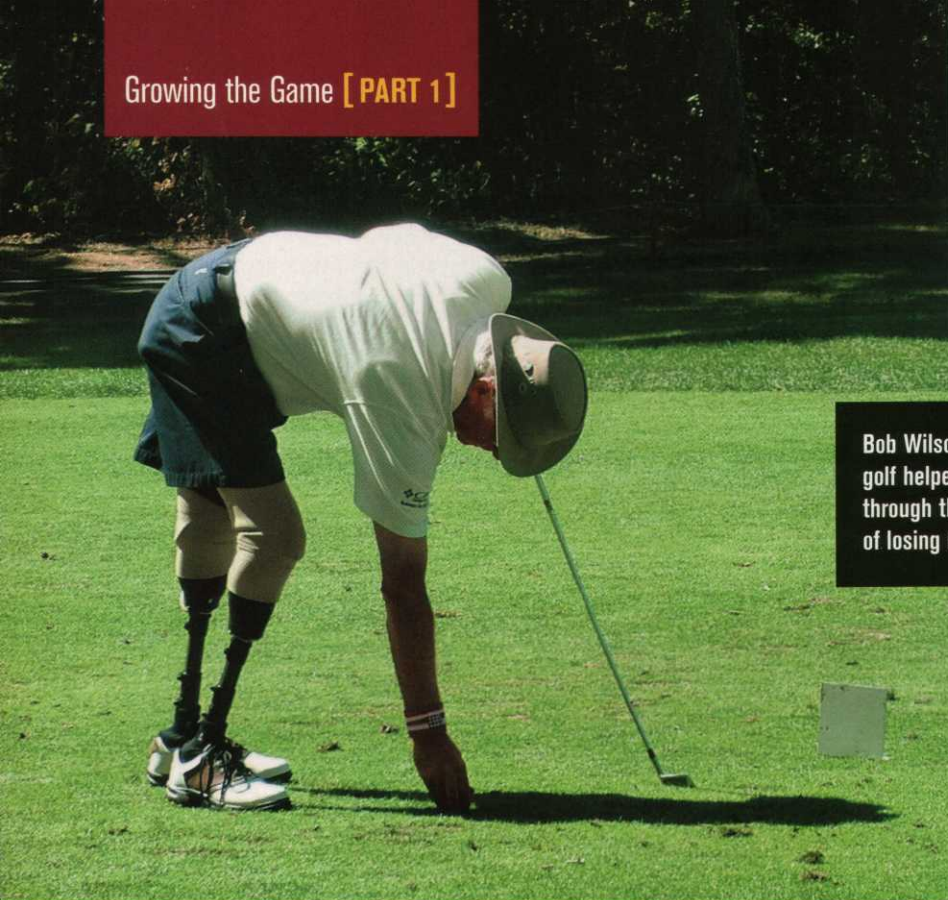


RS48-11B Roll, Spike and Broom Golf Greens Roller using the latest patented triple offset roller technology

TRU-TURF EQUIPMENT 56 Export Drive, Ernest, Queensland 4214 Australia. Contact Ray or Keith on:

US Cell. 619 559 1624 **T.** +61 7 5594 7199 **F.** +61 7 5571 5493 **E.** sales@truturf.com **W.** www.truturf.com





Bob Wilson says golf helped him through the trauma of losing his legs.

that golf is a game they can learn to play and enjoy. And as Ebel and other disabled players will attest — the game can help disabled people live more fruitful lives.

Wilson, a lieutenant commander in the Navy, lost his legs in 1974 in a flight deck accident on the USS Kitty Hawk. While recovering in the hospital, Wilson, a good player before the accident, picked up a copy of "Golf World" with a

photo of Bic Long on the cover. Long had just won the National Amputee Golf Association championship at Pinehurst.

"Amputees *can* play golf," an inspired Wilson told himself.

The accident happened in February and Wilson was on the course in June playing nine holes. "Golf got me through the trauma of losing my legs," he says.

Wilson's message to other disabled people is to "get off your butt and go out and hit a golf ball."

While his message is forthright, Wilson means well. He'd be the first person to help another disabled person off his or her backside to go with him to the driving range. In fact, in 1988 Wilson began First Swing, a program that provides golf clinics to disabled people so they can learn or re-learn the game.

And when they take to the course, disabled golfers feel a sense of athletic accomplishment and physical normalcy. Those feelings help them live meaningful lives.

When Ebel is on the golf course, it's easy for him to forget he doesn't have legs. He feels the same as any other golfer.

"You can't fully appreciate it until you think about how much gets taken away from you when you lose your legs," Ebel says. "But golf is the one thing that doesn't seem any different to me. For the four or five hours I'm on a golf course, it's like nothing has changed." ■

Larry Aylward, editor in chief of Golfdom magazine, can be reached at 216-706-3737 or laylward@questex.com.

Continued from page 35

Bethpage would make other accommodations on the course if needed to accommodate disabled golfers.

"We often have our tee boxes, approaches and par 3's closed off with rope to keep normal golf car traffic off them," Catalano says. "But if someone had difficulty walking the hole, we'd take the ropes down in every single instance."

Robb says he has played with many golfers who have disabilities, including those who use mobility devices, and they tell Robb their experiences and acceptance at golf courses has improved dramatically over the past several years.

"It seems that most golf course operators want to do the right thing and are recognizing that golfers with disabilities have the same rights as anyone else," Robb says. "There are, of course, those [operators] who still resist and who simply are not educated as to their responsibilities."

Wilson says disabled people also need to do their part so they don't hinder other golfers. If a disabled person plays too slowly, Wilson says that person should sharpen his or her game at the driving range before playing 18 holes.

A disabled person should also play within his or her ability to not delay other golfers. "If he can only hit the ball 100 yards and he's on a 500-yard hole, he should tee up the ball in the middle of the fairway at the 200-yard marker," Wilson says.

About one year after his accident, Ebel's best friend showed up at his house and said to him, "Marty, let's go to the driving range."

To which the 21-year-old Ebel responded: "What are you talking about? That's crazy. Even if I can hit the ball, they'd never let me out on a golf course."

Because he was bound to a wheelchair, Ebel assumed his golfing days were over. And today the 47-year-old Massachusetts lawyer understands why other newly disabled people might feel the same way.

"We think of golf as a recreation for people that are healthy and able-bodied," Ebel says. "But that doesn't have to be the case. You don't have to have the use of both hands and feet to play."

Ebel says it's important for disabled people to spread the word among themselves