

FORE-GROUND

Driving ambition fuels recovery

Golf rehab puts stroke patient back in the swing in record time

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In one swift movement, Ray Hooker unleashes a backswing that sends a little white ball soaring — using just one arm.

It's a remarkable feat in its own right. Not too long ago, it seemed an impossibility.

Last year Hooker suffered a massive stroke that resulted in extensive paralysis to his right side.

When occupational therapist Elaine Chan met Hooker last fall, he was in a wheelchair. Less than a year later, the 63-year-old is able to walk with a cane and stand without assistance.

What's more, he's returned to the links, back at the game he's been playing regularly since he was 50. But today, like the professionals who wrapped up the Canadian Open at Glen Abbey Golf Club in Oakville yesterday, Hooker's game is much more than recreation.

A unique partnership between health-care professionals is integrating core elements of the game with rehabilitation and physical therapies. A customized program is helping him get back into the swing of things on and off the fairway.

Hooker's therapists at Toronto's St. John's Rehab Hospital have partnered with a London, Ont.-based physiotherapist who pioneered a program that uses golf as a rehabilitation tool.

Sari Shatil is founder of Therapeutic Golf Rehabilitation, which uses the game to help individuals improve steadiness, balance and flexibility in addition to strength and



even able to stand unsupported when he came down to us, changed from that to ... going back onto the golf course."

Landaburu had previously worked with fellow physiotherapist Shatil and recalled that she had developed an expertise in therapeutic golf. With Hooker's desire to get back on the green and his enthusiasm for the game, Shatil was brought on board, allowing his therapists to consult her for advice connected to helping his golf-related skills.

During a recent visit to St. John's Rehab, Shatil was helping Hooker work on improving his distance in his golf game which, in turn, could help further strengthen the core skills needed for everyday mobility. Part of the session involved monitoring the symmetry of his stance to ensure he was equally distributing weight throughout his body, and challenging his weaker side.

The pair also worked on Hooker's control of the club on the top of the backswing, ran through drills to test his speed and balance, and worked on hip turns — which are related to aim and power — to help him hit the ball farther.

Hooker said being able to put the skills into practice beyond hospital walls makes a big difference.

"Everything you do in the hospital is a very controlled situation, but as soon as you hit the outdoors you are susceptible to the environment so your balance, your overall performance, everything to do with outside improves dramatically," he said. "Not only can you apply (the skills) in your game, you can apply them in your daily life because the things you learn in golf is what you try to exist with in trying to get back to a regular life."