

tee to green

GOLF MAGAZINE

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editor's note



Jamie
Vandermoer
Editor

A few weeks ago I attended a physiotherapy session for people who had suffered strokes. The session was unique because it involved them spending time at the driving range. In fact, the entire program was truly unique because it was based upon teaching or re-teaching the golf swing as a means to enhance the stroke victim's recovery rate.

Project coordinator Sari Shatil, a masters student in physiotherapy and expert in golf swing dynamics, enlisted the help of Fanshawe head professional Mike Olizeravitch, Fanshawe associate professionals Jason Rouse, Jeff Clark, Todd Delmage and River Road Golf Club head professional Andy Shaw, who all volunteered their time to help the group. East Park Golf Gardens donated the range time and balls.

The premise was simple. Take a group of people who had suffered strokes and also had interest in golf and put them through a series of exercises and physiotherapy that helped their golf swing. Shatil found that many of her patients truly missed playing golf, so she figured golf would be a great incentive to work toward recovery. Olizeravitch and the other local pros analyzed the participants' swings, then Shatil formulated the appropriate physiotherapy for each individual.

The theory was a little more complex. The biomechanics of the golf swing, as it turns out, are greatly related to balance and weight shift, two things necessary for most motor skills like walking. Improve the golf swing, and improve everything else, was the plan.

The results were truly remarkable. Though I didn't see these participants in their initial sessions, their stories of accomplishment were amazing. Eleven weeks earlier many of them could barely stand up on their own, let alone swing a golf club. One woman, who was in a wheelchair when the program began, was now walking on her own with the use of a cane. Another man, who had given up the game entirely since suffering a stroke a couple of years ago, was not only hitting the ball splendidly, I'm told he has renewed his membership at his former golf club. In every case the participants made great strides in recovery.

I tell this story for two reasons. One is to credit the man behind this issue's cover story, Mike Olizeravitch. For almost 30 years Olizeravitch has been head professional at Fanshawe Golf Club, and is well-known along with other London Public Golf Course System professionals like Fred Kern, for their tireless efforts in promoting the game, particularly for younger players. Today, Olizeravitch says he's teaching the children of players he first taught two decades ago when they were first starting out in the game.

Today though, Olizeravitch is helping in a new direction. Through this physiotherapy program he's helping people who would otherwise probably never get onto the fairways again. And through the Parkside Nine, a short course at Fanshawe designed for people with disabilities, Olizeravitch is opening up the game to a whole new group who also might never have been able to play.

The other reason for the story is to show the remarkable power of golf. As anyone who plays the game regularly knows, golf isn't just a sport, it's a way of life. I joke about that frequently with non-golfing friends, but among avid golfers it rings far too true. Shatil's experimental project shows that playing golf can really make a difference. I don't want to get all corny here and say golf has some kind of mystical healing powers. No, golf isn't the next shiatzu. But golf becomes more than a hobby, it becomes a part of people's lives, a part that they don't want to lose. And so as a therapy, it's the kind of thing people will work extra hard to regain.

That's off to Olizeravitch and the other local professionals who have donated their time to those who need it.