

Curt Jones Brings Blind Golf to Oak Marsh

79th USBGA National Championship Oakdale, Minnesota

By Jim Gunderson

September 25, 2025

Oakdale, Minnesota – Curt Jones couldn't see the putt, so he relied on his coach's guidance to show him the line. Blind since the age of three and competing in the B1 category for players with no sight at all, Curt Jones, who lives in Battle Lake, Minnesota, steadied his putter, listened for his coach's instructions, and putted. A hush fell as the ball tracked toward the cup. When it dropped, Jones grinned.

“That’s what feels best,” he said later. **“Driving is driving, but sinking a long putt? You’ll never forget it.”**

For three days from September 17-19, Oak Marsh hosted the 79th United States Blind Golf Association National Championship. It was the first time the championship had come to Minnesota, and the quiet fairways of Oakdale carried a different kind of energy. Even in a sport already known for camaraderie and perseverance, blind golf depends on trust and connection. Here, blind golf is more than a game, it is a team sport.

Unlike some adaptive sports, blind golf doesn't change the ball, the clubs, or the course. There's no beeping ball or larger cup. The rules are the same. The only addition is a coach, who acts as the golfer's eyes by describing distances, hazards, and target lines, then stepping back while the player swings.

The Beginning of a Friendship

Curt Jones and Perry Nouis first met as sophomores in Little Falls High School and later served as best men in each other's weddings. Their friendship, built on trust and shared experiences, would eventually set the stage for a remarkable journey into blind golf.

“Out of the blue, Curt says, ‘Hey, would you take me to a driving range?’” Nouis recalled of the day in 2018 that changed both their lives. **“I was surprised. And then WOW, Curt was making good contact. He had just started learning the game, and all of a sudden, he’s on the board of directors at the USBGA, hosting tournaments, running three regionals up in Fergus Falls, and then we thought, how about we host the nationals? And that’s how we got into it.”**

Jones, now 69, laughed as he confirmed the story. **“Yeah, I just wanted to try it. Next thing I knew, I was hooked.”**

Their friendship and trust are at the heart of blind golf. Nouis explains the course, lines up shots, and helps Jones with direction, but when it's time to swing, he steps aside. Trust takes over, and both rely on each other to make the game work.

Jones, who served as this year's Tournament Director, understands both sides of that relationship better than most. His coach is also his best friend of more than fifty years.

“You couldn't do it without a coach,” Jones said. **“When you work with someone you know so well, communication just clicks.”**

What is Blind Golf?

Blind golf has been played competitively for nearly 80 years, guided today by the United States Blind Golf Association and internationally by the International Blind Golf Association. The rules of golf remain unchanged, except that each player is paired with a coach who serves as their eyes. The coach describes distances, hazards, and alignment, then steps aside before the swing.

Players are classified into three categories based on their vision:

B1: No sight at all

B2: Up to about five percent vision

B3: Legally blind with slightly higher visual acuity

These categories ensure fair competition while preserving the integrity of the game. The **USBGA's motto says it all: You Don't Have To See It To Tee It.**

Tournament Atmosphere

The championship featured practice rounds, competition days, and a clinic where coaches and participants introduced newcomers to blind golf, guiding them on stance, setup, hand position, grip, and ball placement. Coaches also helped aim players and cheered every successful swing.

Jones has directed several tournaments in Fergus Falls before, but bringing the national stage to Oakdale felt like a milestone. **“We've been around for 79 years,”** he said. **“But most people still don't know blind golf exists. When I tell people about it, the first question is always, ‘Does the ball beep?’ No. It's just golf. That's what surprises people most.”**

The weather cooperated for most of the tournament. The fairways and greens were wet on Friday morning, slowing play slightly, but the day turned out beautifully for nearly all golfers.

Dave Meador, Lynne Lazaro, and George Pilz were inducted into the USBGA Hall of Fame during the Friday evening awards banquet. **Full results of the 79th USBGA National Championship are available on the USBGA website at usblindgolf.com**

Curt gave credit to all those who helped make the tournament a success, including his wife Tisa, Perry Nous, Tom and Judy Messina, and Chip Arbogast. He also recognized the entire team at Oak Marsh Golf Course, the many volunteers within the USBGA membership and from various organizations, and of course all the golfers and their coaches.

“When I talk to groups, I tell them everyone knows someone with a visual impairment,” Jones said. **“You can't just send Uncle Frank home to sit on the couch. He's got to get out and do something. Golf is one of many things that can change lives.”**

The Final Day

On the final day at Oak Marsh, the scorecards quietly told their story, but the true measure of this tournament's success wasn't determined by the number of birdies or bogies. It was in reconnecting with old friends, making new ones, sharing laughter on the course and in the clubhouse, mingling before and after rounds, and savoring the moments that make golf memorable for everyone. Jones summed it up with the same words printed on every USBGA banner: **You Don't Have To See It To Tee It**. Last week in Oakdale, that truth rolled across every green, and Jones hopes the message spreads: **"The more people who hear about it, the better. We need the next generation to pick it up, so it carries on another 79 years."**

For more information, visit the USBGA website at usblindgolf.com