

From Curiosity to the Green:

How Anne Naber Discovered Blind Golf

By Jim Gunderson
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Anne Naber, a legally blind (B1) golfer from Oakdale, Minnesota, recently took her first official swings during a USBGA clinic at Oak Marsh Golf Course. Players from around the country were in town for the 79th annual United States Blind Golf Association National Championship. Paired with world-class B2 blind golfer Amanda Cunha and her dad, Larry Cunha, who is also Amanda's coach, Anne experienced firsthand the unique challenges and excitement of blind golf. While she had played around at driving ranges before without really knowing what she was doing, this marked her first structured lesson and formal introduction to the sport.

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.**

During the clinic, Amanda and Larry guided Anne, emphasizing the importance of listening to and trusting her coaches while exploring swing techniques and ball contact. Other USBGA members were also on hand, lending a hand and offering advice to those in attendance. Anne noted that feeling the club and ball in her hands, along with the hands-on guidance from her coaches, helped her gain confidence in continuing to play blind golf with proper coaching.

As a B1 golfer, Anne shared her story of becoming blind at age two and a half after a tumor pressed on her optic nerve, resulting in optic nerve atrophy. She discovered the USBGA clinic through the Minnesota National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and has explored nearly every blind sport available. She highlighted one challenge common in blind sports: with relatively few participants, traveling to events can be time-consuming and expensive. Luckily for Anne, Oak Marsh Golf Course is just down the block from her home, giving her easy access to practice and continue developing her skills.

Anne described the joy of hitting the balls, saying, “That was really fun.” She was surprised by her performance, noting, “I thought I would do better on the driving range than the putting green, but it was the opposite.”

Beyond golf, Anne maintains an active lifestyle, participating in strength training, karate, cross-country skiing, and a rowing club. Her professional life is centered around health and fitness; she has been a massage therapist at a local chiropractic office since 2019. Her interest in helping people and staying active aligns with her enthusiasm for trying new sports like blind golf.

After the clinic, Anne shared her excitement with her dad and brother. She began exploring options for golf clubs and expressed interest in taking lessons, joining a league, or exploring local clubs to continue developing her skills. She could see herself joining a Twin Cities chapter of the USBGA if there was enough interest from other local blind golfers or individuals wanting to get involved.

Anne offered advice for others considering blind golf: keep an open mind and try it out. Even though she was never particularly interested in golf before, she decided to give it a shot and discovered a sport she loved. Her positive experience reflects the welcoming and supportive environment of USBGA clinics, which are designed to help new golfers gain confidence and learn from experienced players.

Anne gave the clinic a score of 9.5 out of 10, emphasizing the quality of guidance and the encouragement she received. The USBGA is aware of the need to provide additional resources and guidance for new golfers to help them take the next steps and is actively working on solutions to support continued engagement with new golfers coming on board.

The United States Blind Golf Association (USBGA) is dedicated to growing the game of golf for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Their motto is **You Don’t Have to See It to Tee It**. To learn more, get involved as a player, coach, or volunteer, or to connect someone you know with blind golf, **visit the USBGA website at usblindgolf.com**