

You Don't Have to See It to Tee It!

Ben Zheng's First Swings in Blind Golf

By Jim Gunderson

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Several years after a life-changing accident, University of Minnesota student Ben Zheng took his first swings at blind golf during a United States Blind Golf Association (USBGA) clinic, discovering the thrill and challenge of the sport. At 24, he is already used to overcoming challenges most people can't imagine. A former high school soccer and basketball player, he quickly caught on at the clinic, impressed his coaches, and experienced the excitement of blind golf. Ben studied at the University of Minnesota, graduated last December, and still lives near the university campus.

Ben's accident occurred on August 18, 2019. Standing on a curb in his hometown of Woodbury, Minnesota, a car traveling roughly 45 miles per hour struck him. The crash caused a traumatic brain injury that led to blindness and a partially dislocated neck. He spent six weeks in the hospital, including 14 days in a coma.

Since then, he has rebuilt his life with remarkable resilience. Ben is currently preparing for law school and maintains a busy, active lifestyle. "I like to work out three times a week when I have the time. I like reading books, and I go fishing whenever I can," he said. Ben also has a strong faith, identifying as a follower of Jesus and describing himself as a Christian. "I trust God through it all," he added.

Ben's first encounter with blind golf came at the USBGA clinic, where numerous members of the organization were on hand providing lessons and guidance on the game. For his sessions, Ben was paired with Tyler Cashman, currently the number one blind golfer in America and classified as B2, and Tyler's grandfather and coach, George Cashman. The clinic was free to attend and designed to introduce blind players to the sport, whether for the first time ever or as a reintroduction after losing their vision. The rules of blind golf are the same as regular golf, with the primary difference being that each player works with a coach to guide swings, align shots, and provide feedback.

Blind golf has three classifications recognized by the USBGA and the International Blind Golf Association (IBGA):

- B1 – Totally Blind: No light perception, or light perception that is not functional, either central or peripheral, with or without light projection. Players cannot differentiate between a blank sheet of white paper and a sheet with a black symbol on it.
- B2 – Vision Impaired: From the ability to recognize the shape of a hand up to visual acuity of 20/600.
- B3 – Vision Impaired: From visual acuity above 20/600 up to less than 20/200.

Ben is classified as B1, with total blindness and zero light perception.

Within the first lesson, he quickly impressed his coaches. “They told me I was one of the best new golfers they had given lessons to,” he said. “I really caught on fast, and the coach is almost more important than the player because they guide your swing, line you up, and give feedback you can’t see yourself.”

Many USBGA members note that blind golf is a team sport because the coach plays such an important role. Ben emphasized the value of working with a coach. “I realized a coach isn’t just for tournaments; they’re for building your skills, keeping you consistent, and helping you understand the game,” he said. In conversation with George Cashman, he explored playing with a coach outside of competition to focus on learning and improvement.

Ben rated his experience at the clinic a 9.5 out of 10. “I honestly wasn’t expecting much at first,” he said. “I didn’t expect to hit the ball at all, but by the end of the lesson I was consistently making contact and feeling confident. It was exciting, and I am hoping to golf more after this law school application cycle since I am studying for the Law School Admission Test and applying for law schools. I would probably try to get out there in the spring of 2026.” Though he won’t be able to fully pursue blind golf until after his law school applications, the experience has sparked a new passion.

From a high school athlete to a determined university graduate, Ben Zheng’s journey is a testament to resilience, courage, and the thrill of discovering a new arena to excel in. For anyone with visual impairment considering blind golf, Ben’s story is an invitation: the sport is challenging, fun, and empowering, and one swing can open the door to an entirely new opportunity.

Learn more about the United States Blind Golf Association at: usblindgolf.org or email: info@usblindgolf.org You don’t have to see it to tee it.