

KENTUCKY Golfer

October
2003



MEDICAL MULLIGANS™

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Game for a Lifetime

Golf is a “game for a lifetime”. Beneath the surface of this popular cliché lies insight into not only the enormous popularity, but also the delightful uniqueness of golf.

Golf can be played and enjoyed well into senior adulthood, with a considerable amount of both skill and enthusiasm. At any age or ability level, golfers are able to search for the “perfect” swing tip, discover the “magic move”, or endeavor to shoot a “career round”. Or, we may simply enjoy the scenery and camaraderie, with little interest in our score. Whichever the case, golf teaches us several important lessons, and becomes a mirror of life itself.

We are taught, through golf, that we must accept adversity and strive to overcome it. This applies to something as trivial as a bad bounce out of bounds, but also to much more challenging circumstances – having to play golf with a medical illness or physical ailment, either acute or chronic, and still deriving enjoyment and satisfaction from the game. Most of us, unfortunately, can relate to this situation.

Those who closely follow the professional tours know that there are many players who have dealt with illness and physical limitation, yet risen to become champions. Scott Verplank, Kelly Keuhne and Michelle McGann have fought diabetes for most of their lives. Nick Price has struggled with treating his hypertension while not adversely affecting his golf game. Paul Azinger battled and defeated cancer. Steve Jones came back from a severe hand injury to win a US Open. He was later diagnosed with a heart rhythm abnormality that was successfully treated. Jose Maria Olazabal suffered from a painful foot problem that eluded diagnosis, but eventually persevered to win his second green jacket. There is even a young professional by the name of Erik Compton who has undergone heart transplantation. And let’s not forget Calvin Peete, whose permanently “frozen” elbow yielded his unique and winning swing.

These are dramatic examples of golfers who have confronted medical adversity and triumphed. While the majority of us will not win a Masters or US Open, the challenges these pros have faced apply directly to us and our ability to play golf. With more practical knowledge of our health challenges, we can better manage and conquer them, to play and enjoy this wonderful game for many years.

This idea is obvious to the pharmaceutical industry, and so they choose to advertise using golf as a vehicle. Several companies are “official sponsors” of the PGA Tour. We see their TV advertisements during golf events, some with PGA tour celebrities, including Steve Elkington for *Allegra*®, and Bruce Summerhays for *Celebrex*®, featuring his “daughter the doctor”. In a review of several popular golf magazines, I found advertisements for products to treat prostate problems, diabetes, reflux disease, high cholesterol, erectile dysfunction, anemia, constipation, allergies, arthritis, and smoking addiction. There were ads promoting aspirin for heart attack prevention and numerous health maintenance

products. This range of health issues is common among both golfers and non-golfers, of all ages and both sexes. The “take home” message here is clear – these companies now understand what all avid golfers have always known – we take our health and medical wellbeing quite seriously.

My desire is to share with you, in this and upcoming issues of this magazine, the most common and pertinent medical issues affecting golfers. Much more than just a traditional “sports medicine” approach of treating orthopedic injuries, my focus is on the “total golfer”. With this in mind, let’s discuss an issue relevant to the upcoming winter months, golf’s “off season”.

Hypothermia is defined as “a generalized lowering of the body temperature”, and can affect anyone. Caused by prolonged exposure to cold, it causes serious slowing of all bodily functions. Early signs are not specific, but uncontrolled “shivering” may be one. Difficult as leaving the course mid-round may be, it’s time to seek warmer surroundings! As hypothermia progresses, lethargy, clumsiness, mental confusion, irritability, and hallucinations may ensue. Even though several of these have been used to describe me during a routine round of golf, the point is that this is quite serious and can represent severe heart and lung troubles. At this point, urgent medical treatment is indicated. To help prevent hypothermia, be smart. If it’s too cold, don’t play! Notice “wind chill” in addition to actual temperature. Remember to “keep warm, keep moving, and keep dry”. Wear appropriate clothing, preferably in layers, and bring extra. Remove and change all wet clothing immediately. If you fall into the pond during cold weather while attempting to retrieve your ball, head directly to the clubhouse! As your fitness level allows, keep moving in various ways. Try parking your cart a short walk from your ball, or walking from the green to the next tee. Simple stretches or calisthenics, before and during the round, can help considerably. I also need to inform you that tobacco and alcohol won’t help – and may, in fact, do the opposite. Importantly, watch for the above warning signs and react accordingly!

Understanding medical illnesses and physical limitations, how they affect your golf game and your life, and how to manage them is the key. I’d like to enhance your relationship with your personal physician, to promote further discussion. My approach is from the dual perspective of both avid golfer and Internal Medicine physician, drawing upon my experience as both, with an eye toward what is useful and meaningful. I’ll relate this through examples from certain tour professionals, as it is important and inspiring to learn how they handle their illnesses so successfully. My goal is to excite and educate – to make the complicated and intimidating seem simple and manageable. Understanding medical illness – how it affects our life, our ability to play golf, and how it is managed – is important, interesting, challenging and ultimately satisfying, much like the game of golf itself. It is, after all, “a game for a lifetime”.

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