

Guide to Setting Up a Golf Society

The International Blind Golf Association (IBGA)

The Ingredients

The necessary participants, elements and processes to forming a successful *blind golf society* are:-

- A strong administration
- Access to professional training and development
- Regular golf outings
- Financial support
- Being able to fundraise.

You will find willing partners

- The International Blind Golf Association (IBGA)
- Your local Professional Golfer's Association (PGA)
- Your national golf federation
- National charities and associations that support blind and visually impaired people

Where to Start

A strong administration is usually driven by one or two individuals, committed to the cause. Seek out a champion, most probably a passionate golfer, with the time and energy to take on the challenge of setting up a blind golf association. Ideally, this person will have knowledge and experience of the *Rules of Golf*, and has already served on a golf committee in a golf club, or a golf society. It is not essential that your national champion is blind or visually impaired, but it helps. It definitely helps if this person has experience of playing the game to a high standard before losing his or her sight.

Reaching Out for Members

In the first instance, you should try to make contact with golfers who have given up the game due to sight loss. Almost all golfers who lose their sight stop playing the game. They give up their golf club membership, and put the clubs in the shed. Therefore, approaching golf clubs and societies is probably not the right place to start. Reaching out to your national blind sport association or national blind association might be better. Advertising on their website, or by newsletter is recommended. IBGA has found that by establishing a core group of two or three individuals, and giving them the opportunity to return to the game, can snowball into a larger group of members.

Putting Together a Strong Administration

At this point, you can form a committee, with a short Constitution. Give the society a name and register it with your national golf federation. Organising regular golf outings helps to bond the group, and builds partnerships with golf clubs and golf academies / driving ranges.

Golf offers many playing formats, that are appropriate to the ability of the players. It is vitally important not to overstretch a new golfer or a vulnerable person returning to the game or starting to play for the first time; putting them straight out onto a difficult 18 hole championship golf course is almost certainly going to discourage the golfer.

To get started, consider one of the many playing options:-

- Pitch and Putt
- Par 3
- Nine holes
- Play every second shot with a sighted golfer

Blind Golf is for Two

As well as seeking out champion golfers it is critical to look for guides. The guide or coach is the person that accompanies the blind golfer on the course, setting up his player, making course management decisions, watching the ball, and being responsible for player safety. Most blind golfers start playing blind golf with a family member as guide. However, as players develop, they can team up with a more experienced golfer. Guides are often a limiting factor for blind golfers. It is a good idea to build up a panel of guides as early as possible. These can be recruited by advertising in a golf club, driving range or with your national association.

Getting Better

From a player's perspective, playing blind golf takes time to learn. The golf swing is the same for the blind golfer as for a sighted player. Gaining the mental strength and confidence to execute the swing is greatly supported by professional tuition. Your local *PGA* will put you in touch with a teacher in your neighbourhood. It is important to find a training facility or academy that allows the *PGA* teacher to practice all the golf shots:-

- Putting
- Chipping and pitching
- Short and long bunker shots
- Fairway shots with irons, woods and utilities
- Tee shots

Knowing the Rules and Protocol Associated with the Game is Vital

Golf has three rules; play the course as you find it, play the ball as it lies, and everything else is based on equity and fairness. The third rule, unfortunately, is the most difficult to interpret. The R&A of St. Andrews do so in their publication, *The Rules of Golf*. The R&A has published a set of modifications to the *Rules of Golf for Disabled Golfers*, which you should be familiar with. For blind golfers, there are two major modifications

1. A player may ground the club in a hazard or in a bunker.
2. The guide may stand directly behind a golfer while a shot is being played.

Golf can be dangerous; ask anyone who has been hit by a ball in flight, or got in the way of a swinging golf club. Behaviour on the golf course must take safety into account, in addition to other behaviours that communicate respect to your fellow golfers and for the game itself. This is why it is important to include experienced golfers, who are familiar with the etiquette of the game, from the outset.

Is Golf Expensive to Play?

Like any sport, it can be. You can spend a lot of money on the best golf club membership, golf equipment and attire. However, in most countries around the world today, golf is more affordable than in the past. Most golf courses offer a daily rate. It is possible to purchase some really good second equipment for very little money. The only essential item of golf attire is a good pair of golf shoes.

Covering the cost

The cost of golf to the blind golfer can be quite expensive. There is the cost of equipment, including golf clubs, a golf bag, balls, tees, markers and gloves. Then there is the golf attire, which includes a good pair of shoes, comfortable trousers and tee shirt. And for the inclement weather, you may need rain gear and an umbrella. Transportation to and from golf facilities can also be quite expensive. And the cost for blind golfers can often be doubled because of having to bring a guide.

Golf clubs charge a green fee for a day's play. Golf tuition must also be paid for.

Some Fundraising Ideas

IBGA Member Countries around the world have developed some innovative ways to reduce the cost of golf for golfers.

- Invite a patron to be associated with you
- Invite a charity, such as the Lion's Club to be associated with you
- Organise an annual Golf four-person team event
- Apply for a subvention from your national PGA or national golf federation
- Ask the golf clubs where you play to waive their daily green fees

Now you are ready to really get going

Around the world, IBGA runs clinics for kids and teenagers, teaching them the skills of golf early. These kids often play other sports, but the rationale is that they might come back to golf later. IBGA is also committed to ensuring that female golfers participate in the game too. Actively seeking out female golfers is encouraged.

This document is not a comprehensive guide to setting up a successful blind golf association. In fact, it really only addresses some of the ideas that have worked with *IBGA* members, who are mainly based in wealthy nations. *IBGA* has been successful at developing blind golf in the better off developed countries around the world. We are still learning how to promote the game we love to play globally.

Join us on this journey of discovery – we are here to help!