

“BLIND AMBITIONS”-Lefty’s Story

My name is Darren Douma and golf has been a passion and a huge part of my life. From an early age, my brother Darcy and I golfed as juniors, on high school golf teams, and later as adults. I worked in the golf industry as a Pro Shop Assistant for many years before leaving the industry to be a sales representative with Frito Lay Canada. This career involved driving a delivery truck. However, just over a year into the job I found myself having difficulty with my eyes. I saw my optometrist who then referred me to a specialist who was certain I had an eye disease called Stargardt’s Disease, a rare genetic juvenile form of macular degeneration. A follow up with a second specialist, confirmed it was Stargardt’s. I worked another four years before the vision worsened enough that driving and performing the duties of the job became impossible.

I fell into a deep depression. Golf was still a part of my life, but even it caused frustration because poor vision forced me to rely solely on playing group golf. I believed it was frustrating to my fellow golfers to have to spot my ball and their own on every shot.

Soon I was no longer enjoying the game. At the end of the 2009 season, I was ready to give up the game. Most people get discouraged when they mishit the ball or miss a birdie putt. Mine came from the challenge of locating my ball.

Because of being a south paw, I am called "Lefty". The suggestion was frequently made that standing on the wrong side of the ball may have contributed to my struggles on the golf course. Yes, we lefties take a lot of verbal abuse.

My outlook changed the following spring, after the 2010 Master’s at Augusta. Phil Mickelson was making a great charge for another green jacket. In round 3, he hit a stray shot into the trees on #13. Things weren't looking too promising. However, I had a feeling that Phil would go for it and pull off an amazing shot to save the hole.

Well, Phil did indeed go for it. He proceeded to not only get it out of the trees, but managed to knock it within 3 feet of the pin. Phil went on to win his third green jacket the following day. However, that shot on Hole #13 changed my attitude and my life. That shot Phil hit in the trees taught me no matter what obstacles you are facing, you should never give up. “Anything is possible”. It made me determined to play golf once again and I’ve never looked back.

I shared my struggles and need for a lot of assistance playing the game. I joined a large group of men that played a weekly group game. I was honest with them and they had no issues assisting me with every golf shot on the course. Of course, my shots stray a lot, so they always have their work cut out for them.

In 2010, I established “VIBE” *Vision-Impaired Blind Empowerment*.

(www.vibebc.com) The “VIBE” Mission is clear: “To encourage those dealing with vision loss to focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. To empower oneself and others through blind golf, and through the power of sport.”

I discovered the existence of blind golf in 2012 when I became acquainted with BC Blind Sports. I was introduced to a partially-sighted golfer from Port Alberni, Doug Stoutley, who was, at that time, the President of the Western Canadian Blind Golf Association and an active member of the Alberni Valley Lions Club.

Doug encouraged me to get involved in blind golf. In 2013, Doug and the Alberni Valley Lions Club hosted both the Western Canadian and Canadian Championships.

This was my first-ever blind golf event and with the assistance of my brother Darcy, I placed runner-up in the Western Canadian Championships

Now, I was hooked on blind golf. The following year I attended the World Championships in New South Wales, Australia and represented the Province of BC and Canada in my first international blind golf event. With my local guide, Ian Filmer, I finished second in both the Australian Open and the World Championships.

The following three years were just as exciting and eventful. 2015 was the opportunity to represent Canada and Team North America in the Vision Cup in Milan, Italy.

But beyond competing in blind golf, I wanted to give back to blind golf. In 2015, after Italy, I hosted the Canadian Championships in my hometown of Creston, BC. This event was well received and very successful largely due to the many volunteers, some of whom were valuable Lions members.

This past year, I again hosted the 2017 ISPS HANDA Vision Cup, This event had Team North America taking on Team Rest of World in a Ryder Cup style match play format. This event was even better received than the previous Creston event, and was beyond successful. All international participants said that this was the best and most memorable event they had ever been a part of in all their travels around the World.

I currently volunteer as President of the Western Canadian Blind Golf Association and VP of Admin with Blind Golf Canada. I feel great satisfaction knowing the work I put into these organizations is beneficial to all our members and provides opportunities for their growth and success through sport, despite their vision loss.

The blind golf organizations continue to work hard to attain sponsorship and corporate support for the growth of blind golf in Canada. Fortunately, we have had great support from many Lions Clubs in Western Canada. We’re truly thankful to the 16 BC clubs that

supported us in 2017. As a blind golfer from BC and a Lion, I hope we can count on support from more of our BC Lions Clubs in future years.

Not only did the WCBGA host the Western Canadian Championships this past year in Warman, Saskatchewan, it also provided significant funds to assist Creston, BC in hosting the Vision Cup. This makes it somewhat more challenging in hosting their annual event in 2018 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As president, I am also looking ahead to 2019 when BC is slated to host the 2019 Western Canadian Blind Golf Championships in Kimberley, BC. (July 8th-July 10th) In addition, BC is slated to host the ISPS HANDA Canadian Blind Golf Championships in Cranbrook, BC. (July 11-July 13th)

You can find out more about blind golf, Lefty, and the 2019 events at, www.vibebc.com



Dear Lions Clubs of British Columbia,

THANK YOU

The Western Canadian Blind Golf Association is reaching out to thank you, especially to those Clubs who have supported blind golf for years and to those Clubs who have recently been made aware of our organization and our need. For over 30 years, Lions clubs in Western Canada, have helped us to host one of the most successful Blind Golf championships held to date anywhere in Canada. In 2018, our WCBGA Championships will be hosted in Winnipeg, Manitoba in July followed by the Canadian Championships in Nova Scotia in August. Coincidentally, in 2019, both the WCBGA Championships and the Canadian Championships will be both be hosted together in British Columbia.

GET INVOLVED

Most people across Canada are unaware that blind and partially sighted people play golf from an elite level to just taking up the game as their sight fails. Many people who have become blind are unaware that blind golf actually exists and this is the purpose of this letter to those Clubs who are not aware of what exactly it is we do. As Lions you are the Knights of the Blind, and we believe there are individuals in your communities who

have lost their sight and would enjoy having a Lion volunteer take them back out to the golf course.



Many volunteers make light work!

PROMOTE & GROW

Lions Clubs, especially in western Canada where long standing relationships have already been forged, realize that they can do more than give financial support for the blind; they can be involved in mutual activities and golf is one such activity.

We ask you to keep your Lion eyes and ears open for those who are blind or have vision loss in your community. Help us recruit new golfers and ensure that our blind citizens remain totally unaware of the great opportunities that lie ahead through friendship with Lions and possibly by taking up the great game of golf.

Whether it's a Lion member or a person in the Lions community who is blind or partially-sighted, they have the opportunity to participate in blind golf. In Western Canada, we host Provincial tournaments in which golf clinics are usually included. This gives those

who are new to the game to those that have played for years the opportunity to work on their game.



Thanks to the Lion's involvement and contributions! We sincerely thank you for your support!