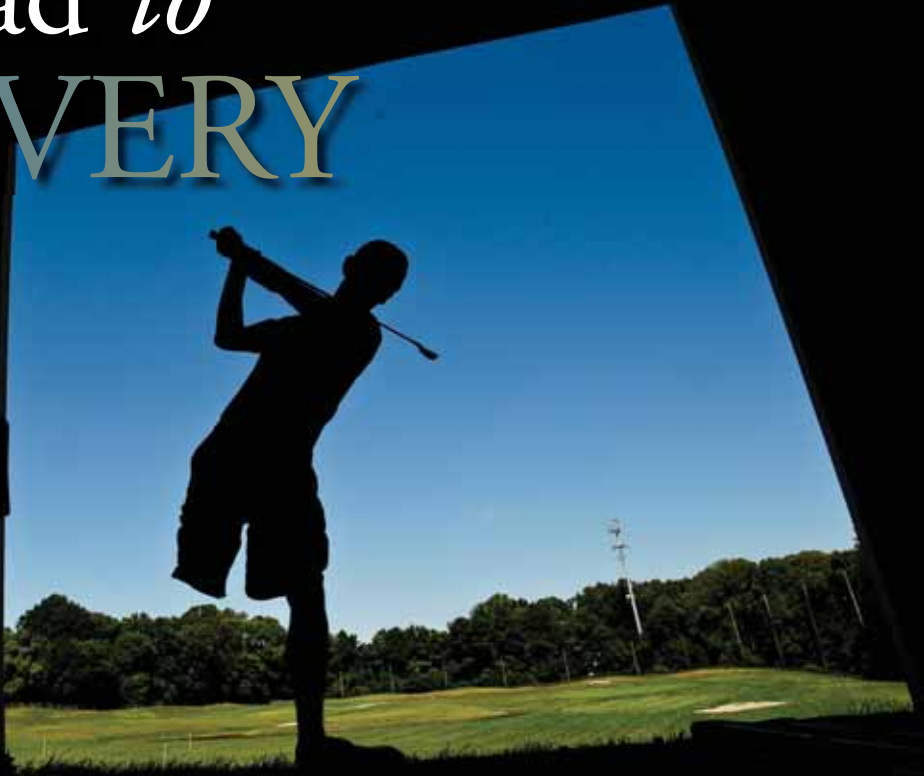


A Road *to* RECOVERY

The Salute Military Golf Association (SMGA)

by Karen Schmitt



Sean Lewis at Olney Golf Park (Jamie Squire, Getty Images)

Athletes from around the world gathered in Beijing last month to test their skills. Prior to the games, however, a swimmer and a sprinter—Natalie Du Toit and Oscar Pistorius both from South Africa—captured media attention around the world as the first amputees ever to qualify for this competition. Closer to home, US service men and women who have lost limbs on the frontline in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate the same spirit of sportsmanship and determination on the golf course instead of a pool or a race track. They may not claim international newspaper headlines, yet they too have achieved victory over injuries. They are strong, brave and focused.

As of February 2008, the DOD reports 1,031 amputees, of whom 730 have suffered major limb amputations. Of the 1,031 total, 77.5% sustained their injury while in the Army, 18.8% sustained their injury while in the Marines, 2.3% sustained their injury while in the Navy, and 1.4% sustained their injury while in the Air Force. [United States Military Casualty Statistics: Operation Iraqi Free-

dom and Operation Enduring Freedom, March 18, 2008]. Prior to OIF / OEF, the most common approach to therapy for combat-wounded service members was limited to the confines of a hospital or clinic. Now, military patients participate in various outings that contribute to both their physical and mental well being. As remarkable as it may seem, the road to recovery can begin on a golf course.

Contributions received by SMGA are applied in full to help injured soldiers—customized golf equipment, greens fees, instruction, club costs, and travel expenses to join golf outings and competitions. Lesson are held in 8-week sessions during the spring and the fall; soldiers are welcome to practice according to a schedule that they choose. Administration of SMGA is managed by a handful of volunteers.

“We are proud to support the SMGA. These brave men and women deserve so much for what they’ve given to our country. I and everyone at FedEx Custom Critical thank them for their service and the personal sacrifices they’ve made to protect our freedom.” Virginia C. Albanese. President and CEO, FedEx Custom Critical.

The Salute Military Golf Association (SMGA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, provides rehabilitative golf experiences for combat-wounded veterans in an effort to improve their quality of life and morale. The organization came about in 2005 after Jim Estes, Golf Pro, Instructor and SMGA President, saw benefits first hand when a group of patients from Walter Reed Army



Jim Estes, President, SMGA (Jamie Squire, Getty Images)

Medical Center joined him on the greens at Olney Golf Park, MD. Since its founding, approximately injured soldiers and marines have benefited. Not all have been amputees. Some have suffered from traumatic head injury caused by roadside explosions.

SMGA is not a one-time stand. Soldiers receive one-on-one instruction through 8-week sessions in the spring and fall, customized golf equipment tailored to their needs, and invitations to compete on local and national levels that includes travel and accommodations. Jamie Winslow, SMGA Chairman explains, "A knowledge of golf is not a pre-requisite. The desire to get out, or meet others, or test themselves physically is all that is necessary. Many of the injured are young soldiers who played football or basketball in high school. Golf requires mental discipline and balance, and because of their affinity to sports and their military training, they are determined in spite of physical obsta-



SMGA Spring Golf Clinic at Olney Golf Park (Ellen Kay, SMGA)

cles." SMGA initiatives have proven that golf is therapeutic, and the way SMGA is designed, the soldiers can concentrate on learning the game at their own pace... on their own time....as they choose....and with complete attention to their individual needs and abilities. This is what sets SMGA apart from other programs.

Military members are pros when it comes to challenge. According to Barbara Romberg, a clinical psychologist in the Washington area who works extensively with wounded veterans, "Anything that can motivate people to work again at developing skills is a potent rehabilitative tool. It doesn't have to be golf—for some people it can be something computer-based, or something like painting—but golf has proven to be a very effective medium. [Wall Street Journal. October 20, 2007]. DTJ



Dennis Walburn at Olney Golf Park (Jamie Squire, Getty Images)

>> This conference addresses one of the most important issues that will continue to challenge us for the foreseeable future. "It's time that something like this took place."

The US Naval Institute (www.usni.org) one of the oldest and most-respected professional military associations in the US, will host a day-long conference, "Measuring Success: Keeping Faith with Wounded Warriors and Their Families" on September 17th at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. The Conference is co-sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable James B. Peake (Ret.), M.D.
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Gordon England
Deputy Secretary of Defense

"Every American should be concerned with the care and recovery of wounded warriors and their families," says Major General Tom Wilkerson, USMC (Ret.), USNI's chief executive officer.

"They have written us blank checks to defend our freedom and our way of life. In exchange, we have made a sacred promise to serve them as faithfully as they have served us when they are harmed or suffering. The purpose of this conference is to bring the public up to date on the status of our promise."

Active-duty military may attend without charge

To learn more about SMGA and how you can help, visit: www.golfsalute.org

