

## **Aidan's golf story**

My son's name is Aidan and he commenced playing golf with the Amputee golf Association of South Australia on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. Aidan has a multiplicity of medical conditions including Complex Congenital Cardiac failure (having had four open heart surgeries before his sixth birthday), has total heart block and is pacemaker dependent, Lung problems and bowel problems, Aidan's disability is Phocomelia Major which means he has grossly shortened upper limbs with three digits on each hand, no use in his left arm and very limited use in his right hand. Aidan's multiplicity of medical conditions and disability means that he is medically banned from playing contact sports like soccer, football and interschool sports. Aidan attends Sacred Heart College Middle School and is in year 7.

This is Aidan's story. I read an article in the Novita magazine Nexus about a program called Connect ability. The aim of the program was to get children with Disabilities into sports. I discussed the program with Aidan and he was interested. The next day I phoned Connectability and spoke to a lady named Emily. Emily arranged a time to meet Aidan and discuss the sports he was interested in. Aidan had golf as a high priority and many years earlier had stated at the upper limb clinic that he wanted a prosthetic limb so he could play golf. Emily contacted Mr Gary Hart president of the Amputee Golf Association. Gary phoned Aidan and I within the week and we arranged to meet at Grange Golf Course as he was running a clinic on the Saturday. We went to the golf clinic and met Gary and Emily from Novita came along to have a look at how the clinics were being run. I was very impressed with the professionalism of the clinics and the Golf Professional running the clinic with Gary was Warren. Aidan thoroughly enjoyed the clinic and we decided to come to the next clinic.

Aidan has been a member of the South Australian Amputee Association since 2008. Aidan and I regularly attend the fortnightly Amputee Golf Clinics arranged by Gary (President of the South Australian Amputee Golf Association). At the golf clinics Aidan has benefited from professional tuition from Gary Hart and the golf professionals Gareth and Nathan from Adelaide Shores Golf Course. Aidan has learnt many golf skills and lessons in golf etiquette, the focus of the clinics is to improve your golf skills, get ready for the annual tournament, to encourage each other. The main aim is to focus on your ability and not disability, everyone at the clinics is equal and there is a great sense of fun and friendship. Gary always encourages everyone at the golf clinics especially the young people to consider the clinics as a training time for the tournaments and for the next Paralympics now that golf is a recognised Olympic sport.

Aidan has progressed very well in Amputee golf clinic and is able to participate in mainstream golf clinics at Adelaide Shores and enjoys being with his peers and socialising with other children. The able bodied children learn to focus on ability and not disability and to appreciate each other's skills. After receiving the Novita Sports and Recreational award Aidan made friends with an older gentleman Dave McNally who every week assists him at the golf clinics

The annual tournaments are held in November and are the highlight of every golfer's year and bring in many interstate and overseas amputee golfers. The tournaments are organised and run extremely professionally and consist of a Junior Tournament, Pro-am day, Round one and two (the official tournament). The junior tournament includes mainstream children as the members of the South Australian Amputee Association are in mainstream schools. It also provides able bodied children with the opportunity to participate with their friends in a tournament and to realise that others have

differing abilities, and always to focus on someone's abilities. The tournaments all have presentation dinners which are attended by all the golfers and their families, friend's, volunteers and carers. The tournaments are fun as well as providing an opportunity for players to make new friends and catch up with old friends from the previous year. The Tournaments provides a wonderful opportunity for golfers to share their stories and experiences not only in golf but in everyday living. Many life time friends are made at these tournaments. Aidan was able to meet two Americans at the last tournament including Craig Van Kessel (aka Captain America) and Chris Wicks we keep in contact with both and other golf members via the internet.

Aidan has learnt many everyday skills from playing golf. Aidan is able to go to school on Monday and say her played golf on the weekend the same as his friends played soccer. Sport is a great equaliser among young boys and participation in sport is important. This was clearly demonstrated when Aidan won the Recreational and Sporting Achievement award from Novita Children's Services in 2009. He was mentioned at the assembly and was in the school newsletter, so the entire school could recognise his achievements. This greatly improved his self esteem. The sports teacher last year was not able to decide on Aidan's sports grade, so I directed him to the website and videos of the 2008 tournament, Aidan came home very proud of his B grade as before this he used to get unclassified. One of the first things Aidan writes in his school diary every year is the week of Golf tournament as this is very important to him. Aidan and Jesse were asked to go on television last year to talk about golf clinics and junior tournament. He was very pleased to be asked and told all his friends at school. His sports teacher has asked Aidan to bring his clubs to school so when the class does PE and if he can't participate he can practice golf, to get ready for the next tournament. It is to Gary's credit that he now runs golf clinics at schools, helping to broaden students and teachers perspective on disability.

Aidan's level of fitness has improved since playing golf and this has lead to reduced illnesses and a huge improvement in his health. His doctors and specialists have noted an improvement in his general health and self esteem

The South Australian Amputee Golf Association provides professional golf clinics and tournaments to people with a disability. Playing golf also provides much needed sporting activities to people with a disability as golf is a non contact sport it is able to be played by a variety of people. Golf as a sport focuses on doing your personal best and is aimed at improving your abilities. The South Australian Amputee Golf Association aims at always focusing on your abilities. Golf provides an opportunity for people to make friends and improve your social networks. The South Australian Amputee golf Association would not be possible without the expertise, dedication and commitment of Gary Hart the president to whom we are all indebted to for his hard work and determination.

By Bernie Barry in consultation with Aidan Barry