



## **A Guide to Blind Golf**

### **Introduction to the Game**

Firstly, it is assumed that the readers of this "Guide" are familiar with the golf club as a sporting implement and the golf ball as a missile employed in the game of golf. Australia is governed by the R & A which is based at St Andrews Scotland. The R & A has developed and published a document known as "The Rules of Golf" which is effective worldwide and is updated every two years. R & A also publish a document. "A Modification of the Rules of Golf for Golfers with Disabilities". (free down load from [www.randa.org](http://www.randa.org))

Golf is a self regulating game and all golfers should have a good understanding of the fundamental rules-it is not expected that all golfers will have a total understanding of all the rules of golf

### **Basic Golf**

The game objective is for the player to propel, by means of stroking a golf ball from a "tee", into a hole using golf clubs as the hitting implements.

A "tee", usually indicated by two (2) markers (usually white or blue for men and red for women) is the starting point for each hole. The player "tees up" the ball between and behind the markers and endeavors to hit it to make it move towards the "green" in which is cut a "hole" for that particular tee.



Tees and greens are usually connected by a "fairway". A golf course is eighteen (18) holes or less but 18 holes constitutes one round of golf. Competition is usually played over 18 holes but at the local committee's discretion may be nine (9) holes only.

In competition, the holes must be played in the order set down on the score card.

Except for, "match play" which is a special form of competition, all players competes against the par of the course.

Every hole is graded or indexed according to its degree of difficulty. Holes may be par 5, 4 or 3 only. Simply defined, the par on a hole is the number of strokes a golfer on a zero handicap would expect to score to play to his handicap. Handicaps are given to players to help to equalize results-very few players would expect to be on a handicap of 0!

### **Blind Golf**

Golf is a sport that can be enjoyed by anyone regardless of age, gender, physical condition or challenge. Playing golf is a way to enjoy nature, friendship and exercise while providing an opportunity for personal challenge and growth.

There is no reason why golf should not be enjoyed by everyone, including those with limited or no vision. Whilst it is natural to think of golf as an activity requiring eyesight, that is not necessarily the case. The game of golf is enjoyed by thousands throughout the world who have someone else be their "eyes". This person is called a caddy.

There are three channels by which people with vision impairment come to play golf.

There are those who have played golf as a sighted person and lose their sight and wish to find an avenue to continue their interest in the game. There are others who have never played golf, lose their sight and are looking for an opportunity to participate in a sporting event. And there are those who have never had sight but are looking for a game in which they can participate.

The sport of blind golf can be traced back to 1924. Clint Russell of Duluth Minnesota USA lost his sight when a tire exploded in his face. In 1925 he began playing blind golf. Clint slowly reduced his scores and by early 1930 had a score of 84 for 18 holes!

This manual is designed to assist those who are already playing blind golf or those that are “willing to give it a go”!

## **How is Blind Golf Organised?**

### **Internationally**

The International Blind Golf Association (IBGA) formed in 1998 and is the governing and sanctioning body of blind golf throughout the world. The IBGA is dedicated to promoting the sport worldwide, and assisting all blind golfers enjoy the game.

There are 11 member countries in **Australia**, England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Japan, USA, Canada and South Africa. France, Israel and the Republic of Korea are associate members.

IBGA establishes policies for blind golf for all its members and associate members. Details [www.internationalblindgolf.com](http://www.internationalblindgolf.com)

### **In Australia**

Blind Golf Australia or BGA (formerly Australian Blind Golf Association) was formed in 1992 with four member associations based in Western Australia, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

The objectives of BGA are to

- promote the game of golf amongst blind and vision impaired golfers throughout Australia.
- co-ordinate golf for blind people between the states
- make standard policies for blind golfers throughout Australia
- co-ordinate blind golf events within Australia.
- maintain a register of all Australian players, their sight classifications and handicaps
- represent Australia at the international level
- manage all national and any international events held in Australia.

Golf Australia and BGA have a Memorandum of Understanding which provides the mechanism to promote the game of blind golf in Australia.

WA, NSW, SA and VIC manage blind golf events played in their states and organise their own funding. Individuals become members of their respective state associations and are bound by the rules of that organisation. Any prospective blind golfer from other than the 4 states mentioned is encouraged to make contact with BGA refer to website for details. [www.blindgolf.com](http://www.blindgolf.com)

## **Sight Classifications**

Blind golf is played with three sight classifications:

### ***Blind B1***

No light perception in either eye up to light perception but unable to differentiate between a blank sheet of white paper and a sheet of white paper with a black symbol on it. All B1 players are required to wear approved black out glasses in any competition sanctioned by IBGA or BGA

### ***Vision Impaired B2***

Is from B1 to a maximum of less than 2/60 or equivalent corrected in either or both eyes in any direction

### ***Vision Impaired B3***

Is from a B2 to a maximum of less than 6/60 (20/200) in any direction  
Corrected in either or both eyes

The IBGA has a standard sight classification form – **refer Appendix A**. All blind and vision impaired golfers must update this sight classification form at least every three years or when there is a change in their eyesight.

All prospective members must complete a sight classification form to be eligible for membership.

Only those with B1, B2 and B3 sight classifications are eligible to compete in national and international events.

BGA have introduced a **B4 category** to gain the interest of those vision impaired golfers who do not currently comply with the above BGA sight classification requirements. A Vision Impaired B4 is defined as from B3 above up to and including 6/36 visual acuity. B4 players will be eligible to play local and state events and in the Australian Stableford Championships. B4 players can only be eligible to win their own sight category providing there are at least 3B4 players participating in their event

## **So How is Blind Golf Played?**



With two major exceptions, and a couple of minor ones, Blind Golf is played in exactly the same way as sighted golf. However, Blind Golfers require a caddy (or guide -a term used in other countries) to assist them around a golf course. The golfer and their caddy form a "Team" the caddy is the blind golfers "eyes"!

The major difference between blind/sighted golf is that blind golfers are allowed to ground their club in a hazard. A hazard is usually a bunker but can be a water hazard in some circumstances. The other major difference is that the caddy may stand behind the flag as the blind golfer putts. Refer to the Modifications of the Rules of Golf for Golfers with Disabilities.

Blind golfers should be aware of how far they normally hit a golf ball with a particular club. The caddy should advise the distance required and the golfer should immediately nominate which club is required.

Some blind golfers experience severe difficulties in bunkers. If the golfer so wishes, he/she can declare the ball unplayable and then MUST return to the exact spot from where the first ball was played, and with a ONE SHOT PENALTY play another ball. This is in accordance with the Rules of Golf

Otherwise blind golfers play golf as though they are sighted-experiencing all the highs and lows of sighted golfers.

### **The Role of a Caddy**

A blind golfer and his/her caddy form a team with the caddy acting as the golfer's eyes. The caddy has a number of responsibilities depending on the golfer's sight. To caddy for a B1 (totally blind) player can be more difficult than caddying for a golfer with a B2 or B3 classification.

The caddy tasks are many and will usually include

- ensuring the golfer is ready to hit off at the assigned time
- checking the local rules (usually on the back of the scorecard -and sometimes on the notice board at or near the pro shop) before going to the first tee
- ensuring that the scorecard is filled in with the golfer's name, handicap, event and date prior to hitting off
- in stableford /par events and in match play, ensuring that he/she knows exactly which holes the golfer gets strokes on , and how many on each hole
- determining how scorecards will be swapped before hitting off
- clearly identify the type of ball being used by each player
- having a reasonable knowledge of the rules of golf
- ensuring that the golfer keeps up with play in his/her group (see section on slow play)
- ensuring that he/she knows exactly how many strokes the player for whom he/she is marking the card and the player who he/she is caddying for have on each hole
- entering the scores for each hole on completion of the hole after having agreed these with the caddy for the person whose card is being marked. Scores should be entered once the group gets to the next tee and not on the green just completed (see section on slow play). It is suggested that scores be totaled and agreed after 9 holes in an 18 hole event-on the 10<sup>th</sup> tee!
- ensuring wherever possible that he/she has a reasonably accurate idea of where the golfers ball goes, All caddies in the group should work as a team wherever possible in this aspect. If in real doubt as to where the ball went or if it has/may have gone out of bounds, get the golfer to hit a provisional ball. Advise the others in the group that the golfer is hitting a provisional ball clearly identifying what type of ball the golfer is hitting



- being able to reasonably accurately judge distances. A visually impaired golfer relies on their caddy to advise the distance/direction the next shot should be hit. The caddy should consult with the golfer about which club to use- the golfer makes the final decision.

- -being able to “read” greens for pace, direction and slope. Do this immediately the group is on the green when it is safe to do so. If required, stand behind the flag whilst your golfer is putting
- at all times be aware that a golf ball can be a dangerous missile. Ensure that safety of the golfer and the caddy is paramount in positioning on the fairways and greens. Be particularly aware when going into the rough or on to another fairway to hit your ball - you have no rights on another fairway to the one you are playing-you must give way to those golfers who are playing that fairway!
- be aware of your position in the field at all times-it is imperative that you keep up with the group in front (see rules on slow play)
- agree the score with your opposite number on completion of 18 holes. Complete the cards and ENSURE that your golfer signs his/her card. Hand the card to the person appointed by the Committee organising the event to receive completed cards
- Then have a drink!!!!

### **Slow Play**

Blind golf by its nature can be a little slower than sighted golf. However, slow play is the source of constant complaints throughout the world of golf. The notes below contain some useful hints on how to avoid slow play.

Blind golf is usually played on busy public courses. If blind golfers are slow, the whole field is disrupted! And slow play is selfish play!

Some things to remember:

**It is not how far we are in front of the group behind us, it is how far we are behind the group in front! (This is the simplest measure of slow play.)**

The lowest handicapped player in the group has the responsibility to ensure that the group keeps up. If you get a gentle reminder to quicken up your play, don't be upset. Everyone hates slow play!!

- Mark your score cards after hitting off if able to proceed without delay
- Play "ready golf" wherever possible and safe. For example if the group in front is 160 meters away, and your group has 2 players who never hit more than 120 meters, let them hit off - don't wait for the other 2 players who can hit 180 meters!
- Your caddy should be aware of the position of your ball-move quickly to your next shot when it is safe to do so.
- Assist playing partners to find a ball **after** you have played your next shot.
- Remember, you only have 5 minutes to find a lost ball. If you are holding up the group behind in looking for a lost ball, call the following group through provided your group takes adequate safety precautions. If in doubt play a provisional ball after advising your playing partners that you are doing so.
- A player should have no more than one practice swing.
- Be ready to putt when it is your turn. You or your caddy should do a preliminary reading of the green immediately you arrive at the green. But remember to be still and quiet whilst a playing partner is putting.
- In stableford events, pick up immediately you can't score on the hole.

Golf is a leisure sport and is not meant to be rushed. However to ensure that those



playing behind you also enjoy their golf and do not have to wait on every shot, just follow the above advice.

BGA and Golf Australia have determined that referees will be appointed for National and State Championships. These referees have the power to disqualify a player or players for slow play.

Caddying can be difficult but rewarding task - and it should almost always be fun! A caddy gets to share the triumphs and commiserate with the lows of the blind golfer. You will both remember the 8 meter putt sunk on the 8<sup>th</sup> hole, and not the 0.5 meter putt missed on the 17<sup>th</sup>!! Try it!! You will find it most rewarding, and a blind/visual impaired person will continue to enjoy the wonders and challenges of golf.

### **Rule Modifications** (taken from the R & A Modification of Golf for Golfers with Disabilities)

#### **Rule 8-1 (Advice)**

In view of the Definition of "Coach", it is suggested that Rule 8-1 be modified as follows:

##### **8-1.Advice**

During a *stipulated round*, a player must not:

- a. give *advice* to anyone in the competition playing on the *course* other than his *partner*, or
- b. ask for *advice* from anyone other than his *partner*, either of their *caddies* or, if applicable, their coaches.

#### **Rule 13-4b (Grounding Club in Hazard)**

The following additional Exception under Rule 13-4 is permissible:

##### **Exceptions:**

- 4. Provided nothing is done that constitutes testing the condition of the *hazard* or improves the lie of the ball, there is no penalty if a blind golfer grounds his club in a *hazard* preparatory to making a *stroke*. However, the player is deemed to have *addressed the ball* when he has taken his *stance*.

#### **Rule 14-2b (Position of Caddie or Partner)**

Due to the complexities involved in aligning a blind golfer, it may be difficult or unreasonable to expect the blind golfer and his coach to comply with Rule 14-2b. Therefore, there is no penalty if a player's coach positions himself on or close to an extension of the *line of play* or the *line of putt* behind the ball during a *stroke*, provided the coach does not assist the player in any other manner during the *stroke*.

However, given the intent of Rule 14-2b, it may be appropriate to prohibit a coach from remaining in a position that contravenes this Rule if he is performing the duties of a coach or a *caddie* for two different players simultaneously.

## **GOLF THE SPORT FOR LIFE**

