

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*For the good of the game...a report on the status  
of golfers with disabilities in America*

**submitted to the United States Golf Association Foundation  
August, 1999**

***Author's note: This document summarizes the major findings associated with this study. Readers should refer to the full report for detailed analysis and explanations***

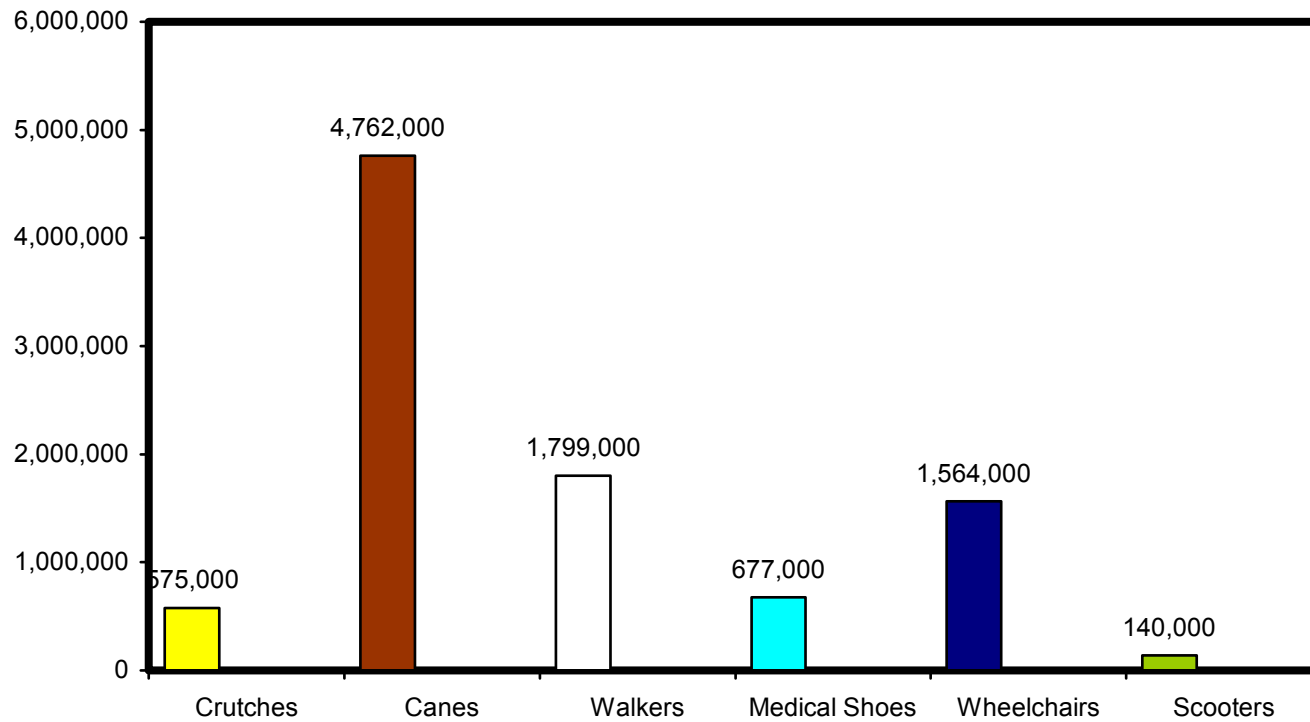
## **Introduction**

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 there was much concern about what golf facilities would need to do to comply with the requirements of the law. There was equal concern from golfers with disabilities as to how they would be received by golf courses. Ten years later, while there has been much in the way of increased activity and opportunities for people with disabilities to get into the game, many questions have remained unanswered or at least unclear.

The National Center on Accessibility has been at the forefront of advocacy efforts relative to the game of golf as related to people with disabilities since 1992. Based on information from both the "golf community" and the "disabled community", the NCA determined that it would be of value to conduct a study to determine how or if any of the issues of the early 1990's had been resolved or had changed. Based on data gathered from these various sources, the project goal was to develop materials that would assist golf operators in developing policies and practices that would provide effective customer service to golfers with disabilities.

A grant application was submitted to the USGA Foundation and funded in the late fall of 1998. The study was conducted between December, 1998 and April, 1999. This document provides a summary of the project findings.

### Mobility Device users in the USA



SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics, 1994

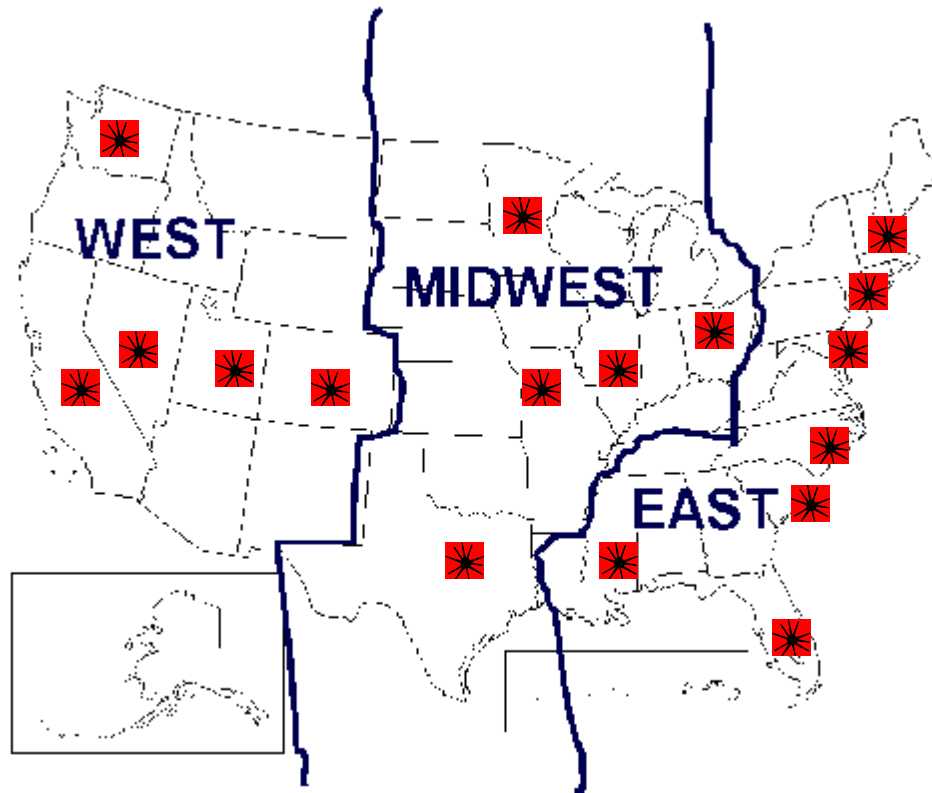
NOTE: In 1994 the U.S. Census Bureau identified 54,000,000 people in the USA with disabilities. Of those, approximately 7.4 million people permanently use one or more assistive mobility devices.

## Study Parameters

Participants in this study included golf course owners and operators, organizations that provide services for golfers with disabilities, and golfers with disabilities. A mailed survey was sent to 50 golf course owners and operators in Southwest Florida in December of 1998. Personal interviews were conducted with forty three (43) golf course owners and operators in Florida, Utah, Missouri, and South Carolina during the months of January, February, and March, 1999. All were public access courses (privately owned daily fee courses and municipally owned courses). Telephone interviews were conducted in February and March of 1999, with seventeen (17) golfers with mobility impairments and with eighteen directors/owners of organizations that provide services (instruction, tournaments, etc.) for golfers with disabilities.

The focus of mailed surveys, personal interviews, and telephone interviews was to determine the perceptions of interviewees relative to various matters concerning the inclusion of golfers with disabilities into the game of golf. The study was limited to “recreational golf” and to golfers with mobility impairments who use assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, and canes for mobility.

## Study Participants - locations

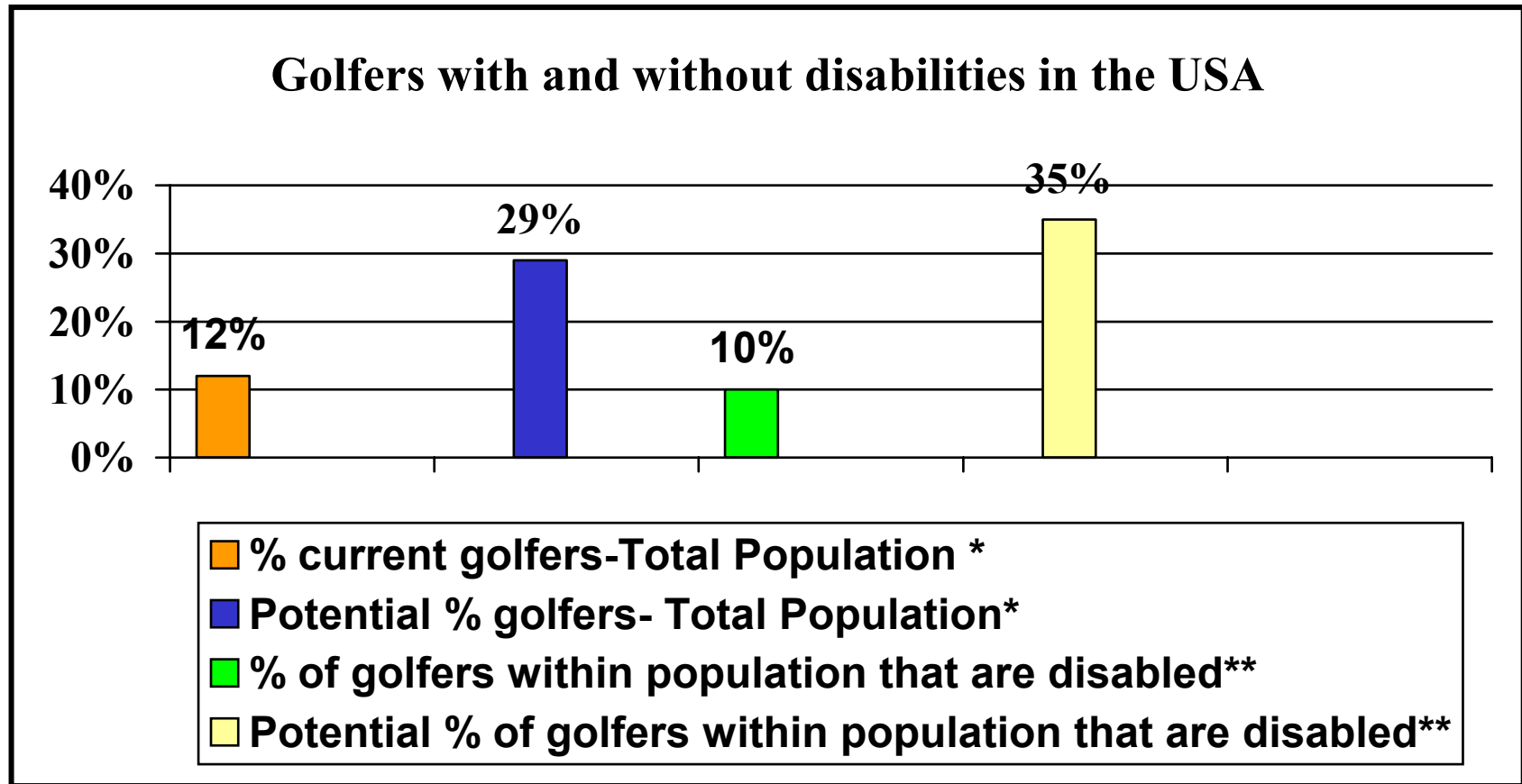


## **Golfers with disabilities. .who and where are they?**

Over 7.4 million Americans use permanent assistive devices including wheelchairs, canes, and/or crutches<sup>1</sup> as a primary means of mobility. In 1998 the National Golf Foundation reported that 26.4 million Americans played golf, (approximately 12% of the U.S. population.)<sup>2</sup> The exact number of individuals with mobility impairments playing golf is not yet known, as programs that provide instruction for them are still in the formative stages. However, if the same percentage of people with mobility impairments were to enter the game as those noted by the NGF study, over 1,000,000 new golfers would be producing revenue for golf courses in the United States.

There is interest in the game of golf by persons with disabilities. In 1995<sup>3</sup> the National Center on Accessibility and Clemson University conducted a random sampling survey of people with disabilities regarding their interest in the game. Over 400 of 1100 questionnaires that were mailed were completed and returned. The chart on the following page provides some comparisons with the recent National Golf Foundation study. The NGF study did not mention golfers with disabilities at any point in its 132 page report.

While the golf industry fails to see golfers with disabilities as a viable market, the number of golfers with disabilities is definitely on the increase, and should continue as they become more aware of the opportunities that are available.



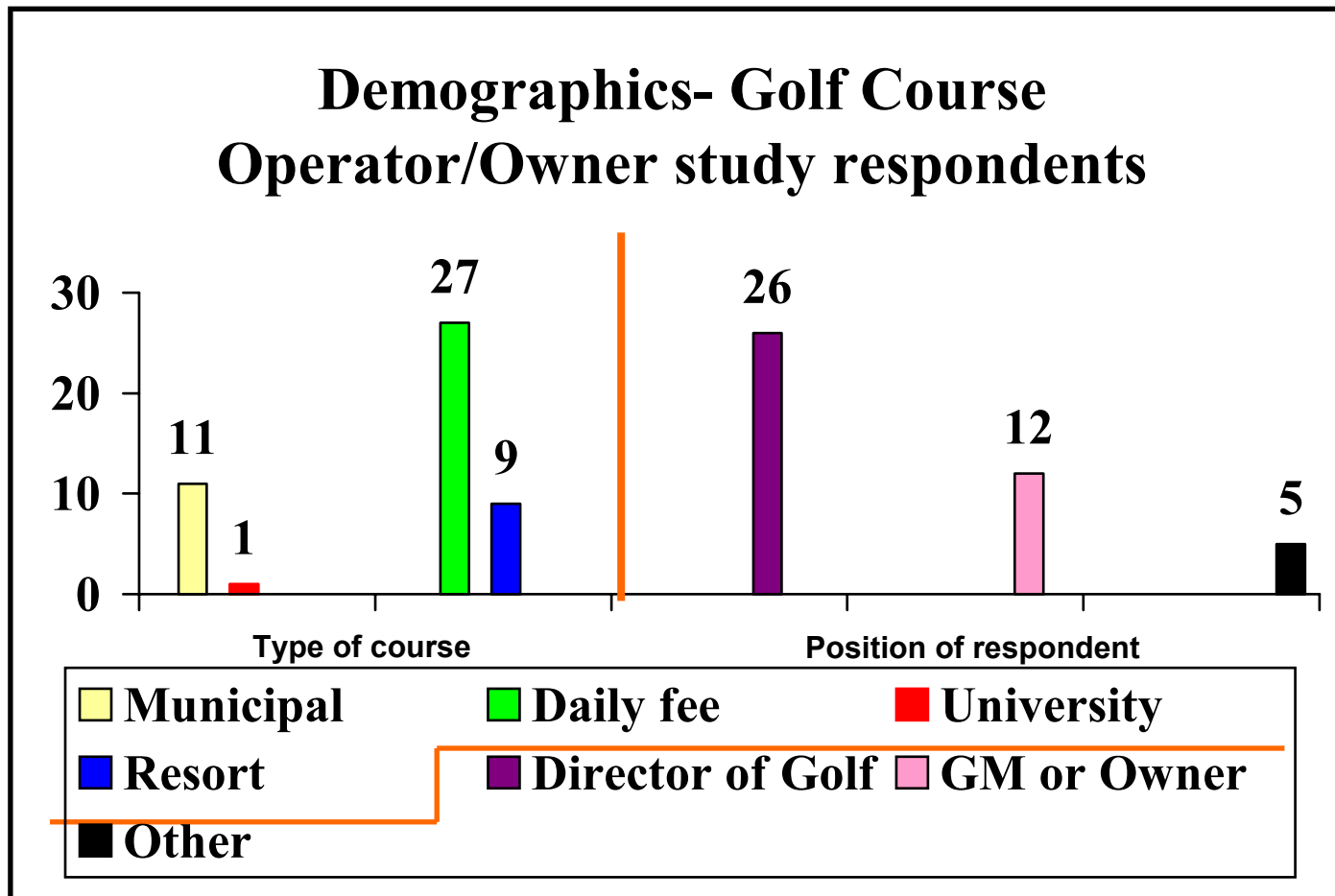
\*"A Strategic Perspective on the Future of Golf," The National Golf Foundation and McKinsey & Company, 1999

\*\*"Survey of Golfers with Disabilities," Proceedings of the Fifth National Forum on Accessible Golf, National Center on Accessibility, Indiana University, and Clemson University, 1996

## **Golf Course Owners and Operators—Summary of results**

A total of 83 golf course (entities) were included in the study. Forty of the fifty mailed surveys were completed and returned. A total of 43 personal interviews were conducted. All study participants were in management positions and had responsibilities for either making or influencing both policy and financial decisions of the golf course or facility. Almost all of the combined respondents indicated a knowledge of the American's with Disabilities Act, and the majority realized that it pertained to their golf operation. Most did not, however, have a clear understanding of how it applied to either their built facilities (parking lots, club house, golf shop, restaurants, etc.) or to the actual golf course.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*For the good of the game... a report on the status of golfers with disabilities in America*

Page 10 of 25

---

Almost all of the study participants indicated that they did not have enough information or education about the law or about golfers with disabilities. Very few had ever seen a golfer who uses a mobility device, nor did they know how they played golf from these devices. In 1994 the National Center on Accessibility, in conjunction with the Association of Disabled American Golfers, conducted a study at the Golf Management School, held in Ogelbay Park, West Virginia. Over 50 participants, mostly golf course operators and managers, responded to a questionnaire about golfers with disabilities. It is interesting to note that in 1994, only 68% of the respondents indicated an interest in having their staff receive education on golfers with disabilities. In the 1999 study, 92% indicated such a desire.

The perceived need for this type of information has obviously increased dramatically over the past five years. Much of this is most likely due to the increased public awareness of the rights of people with disabilities in general, and specifically the wide-spread publicity surrounding the Casey Martin litigation against the PGA Tour. Since most of the respondents had had little direct personal contact with golfers who have mobility impairments, it is likely that part of their interest in having more information was spawned by their involvement in this study.

Because of this lack of information and familiarity with golfers with disabilities, owners and operators had a number of questions and concerns and were interested in receiving more information and education about golfers with disabilities. Generally, they indicated a receptiveness to golfers with mobility impairments playing on their course, but that observation should be tempered by an overall lack of understanding about this population.

**Golf course operator/owner observations about golfers with mobility impairments (N=83)**

<b><u>General statement</u></b>	<b><u>% of all respondents</u></b>
Want information on making course and facilities accessible to golfers with disabilities	96%
Lack, want, and need information and education about golfers with disabilities	92%*
Are willing and have a positive attitude about accommodating golfers with disabilities	93%
Have concerns about the use of mobility devices on the greens and/or tees	87%
Have never seen a golfer with a disability play	84%
Feel that golfers with disabilities may not be educated about the game	85%
Have concerns about pace of play	78%
Want research/objective data on pace of play, mobility device damage, etc.	71%
Want more information on single rider golf cars	57%
Currently have policies regarding golf cars for those with mobility restrictions (flagging, etc.)	37%
Currently have general policies regarding access for mobility impaired golfers	7%

\*70% *initiated* a response regarding needing education. When *asked* if they would like more information/education, 92% said that they would.

## **Golfers with disabilities and organizations providing instruction and other services—Summary of results**

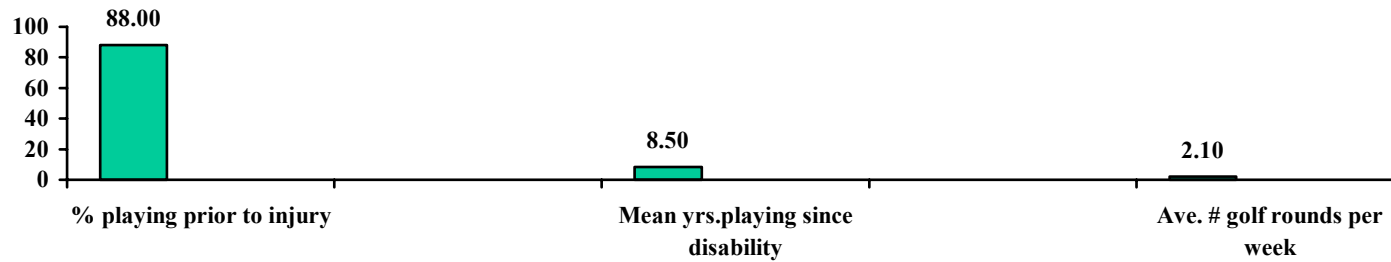
The focus of this study was on learning about current policies and practices of golf courses relative to golfers with disabilities. This information was sought in order to provide suggestions and recommendations that might assist golf course owners and operators in providing better customer service to golfers with disabilities. However, in order to make meaningful judgements, it was important to not only get input from the provider of services, but from the consumer as well. Therefore, telephone interviews were conducted with 17 golfers with mobility impairments and with 18 individuals representing organizations that conduct instructional and other programs for golfers with disabilities. These study participants were picked at random from a list provided by the Association of Disabled American Golfers, and from a list of active golfers and organizations involved in providing services to golfers with disabilities. Golfers with disabilities were individuals who play regulation golf courses independently and not as part of a rehabilitation program.

Organizations surveyed were located in 12 different states, (some states included 2 organizations.) Four organizations were located in Western states, seven in the Midwest, and seven in the East. Golfers with disabilities were spread throughout the country as well: seven in the West, three in the Midwest, and seven in the East.

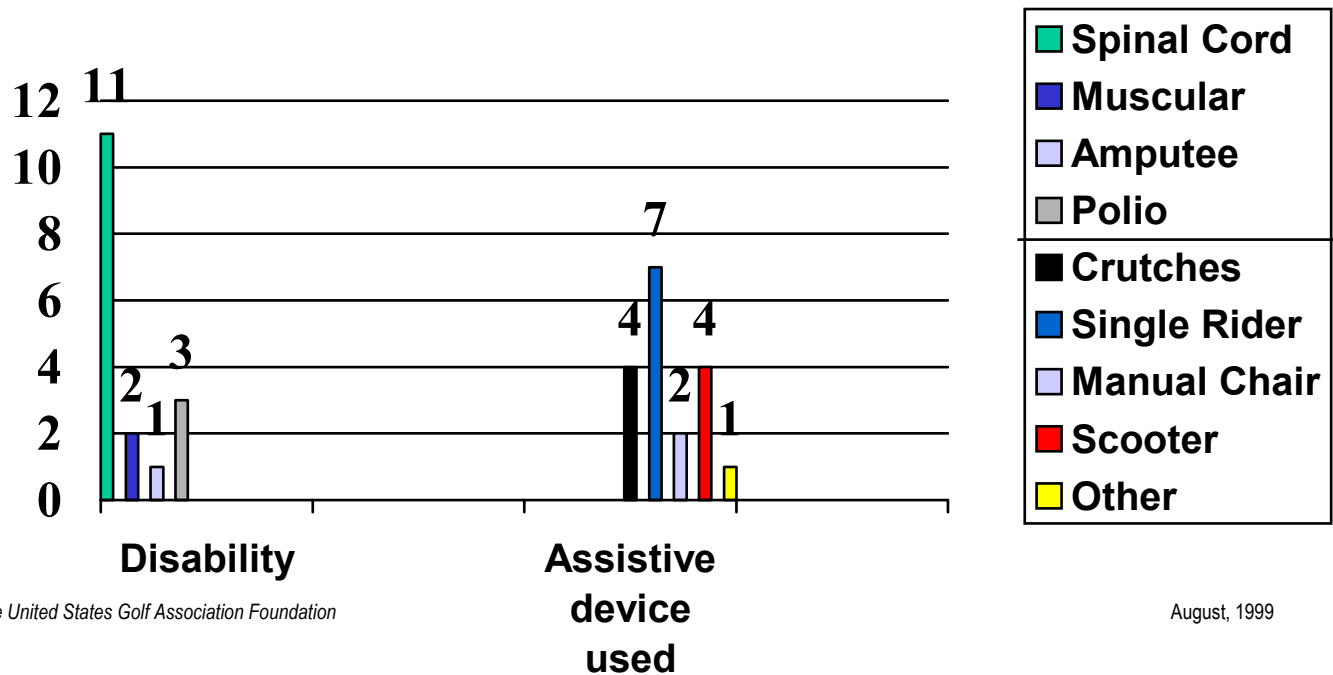
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*For the good of the game... a report on the status of golfers with disabilities in America*

**Study Participants- Golfers with disabilities  
Playing experience**



**Study participants: disabilities  
and assistive devices used**



Golfers with disabilities (having mobility impairments requiring an assistive device to play golf) participating in the study were asked about their experiences playing at public access golf courses. The questions focused on:

1. Their personal experiences with golf course personnel
2. Their perception as to major concerns that they felt golf course operators have about golfers with disabilities
3. What they felt would be helpful to golf course operators regarding golfers with disabilities
4. The barriers that prohibit or create obstacles for people with mobility impairments to play golf
5. Their opinion as to the reasons why more people with disabilities don't play golf

In general, golfers with disabilities felt that because of their disability (and use of an assistive device) they are watched very closely by golf course staff. While many (38%) indicated that their experiences were generally more positive now than in the past, almost all (92%) indicated that they still experienced situations that would not be experienced by players without disabilities.

Most, (77%), felt that golf course operators were most concerned about damage to their greens by assistive devices. This was followed by concerns of pace of play (62%) and liability (38%). The overwhelming response to the question on what would be helpful to golf course operators regarding golfers with mobility impairments was the need for education about people with disabilities. They also felt that golf courses should provide single rider golf cars; that they needed objective information on damage to greens by mobility devices; and that courses need to eliminate physical barriers. They felt that the major barriers at golf courses included the bag drop location being too far away from the club house; policies restricting golf cars from going into the parking lot, and golf course staff not providing needed assistance.

The respondents felt that there just is not enough education or instruction focused on people with disabilities relative to the game. Many felt that people with disabilities just did not consider golf an activity that they could pursue and did not know about technology that is available to assist them in playing the game.

**Golfers with mobility impairments: Observations about the game of golf and people with disabilities**

<b><u>General statement</u></b>	<b><u>% of all respondents</u></b>
Golfers with disabilities continue to have some negative experiences at golf courses	92%
Golf course operators need education about golfers with disabilities	80%
Golf course operators are concerned about damage to greens by mobility devices	77%
Golf is not an activity that is generally marketed to people with disabilities	69%
Golf course operators are concerned about pace of play of golfers with mobility devices	62%
People with disabilities do not feel that golf is a game that they can play	46%
People with disabilities do not feel welcome at golf courses	46%
Golfers have more positive experiences now than a few years ago (at golf courses)	38%
Golf courses should provide single rider carts	38%
There simply are not enough people with disabilities with the physical capability to play golf	31%
Golf courses need research data on mobility devices and damage to greens	38%
Golf course operators are concerned about liability	38%
Golf courses should eliminate physical barriers to buildings and the golf course	23%

Organizations that provide instruction and/or other services for golfers with disabilities were selected after the following two screening questions were answered in the affirmative:

1. Does your organization provide instruction/services for people with mobility impairments [use assistive mobility devices] relative to the game of golf?
2. Do you prepare golfers with disabilities to play golf on a regulation course, external to your programs?

The purposes of these interviews were:

- to get representative national input on programs across the USA involved in encouraging individuals with disabilities into the game of golf
- To determine the extent of available instruction and programming available for golfers with disabilities
- To determine if instructional goals typically include getting people with disabilities to play golf independently and on regulation golf courses
- To provide a comparison of observations among golfers with disabilities; programs and organizations that serve golfers with disabilities; and the input received from golf course operators

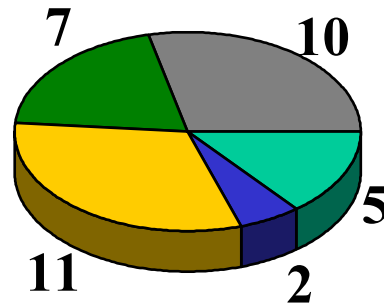
The questions asked were targeted specifically towards golfers participating in their programs who:

- a) have the capability to play on a regulation golf course
- b) have a mobility impairment requiring the need to use a device such as cane, crutches, or wheelchair for mobility

These parameters were selected since in many cases, in order to play, these individuals may require some type of accommodation at the golf course.



## Organization Types Participating in the study (mean years in existence = 7.9)



- Rehabilitation-Medical Facility affiliation
- Public Recreation Agency
- Independent-Private Agency
- PGA-LPGA Instructors Interviewed
- PGA-LPGA Instructors on staff

Organizations providing instruction and other services (tournaments, technical assistance, equipment, etc.) were unanimous in their observations about people with disabilities generally lacking confidence in themselves to play golf. Coupling that with apprehensions about going to a golf course, people with disabilities need to be nurtured into the game. Most of the organizations provide volunteer services and do not operate on a full time basis. None of the organizations participating in the study devote full time or exclusive effort to instructing persons with disabilities to play golf.

The majority of interviewees agreed with the responses of golf course operators and golfers with disabilities that much education is needed in the golf industry about golfers with disabilities, how they play the game, and the equipment that they use to play. While a majority of respondents felt that damage to golf courses by mobility devices and pace of play were concerns, they were not nearly as prevalent as with golf course operators and golfers with disabilities.

Interviewees representing organizations providing services for golfers with disabilities were more focused on issues surrounding getting people with disabilities into the game. They were concerned about the lack of instructional opportunities available to golfers with disabilities, and the lack of attention being placed in rehabilitation programs regarding the potentials of the game for people with disabilities. They felt that people with disabilities are generally not being exposed to the game, aren't aware of equipment or programs to assist them in playing the game, and have major apprehensions about going to a golf course.

The results of these interviews revealed that:

1. Approximately 40% of the golfers currently involved or who had been involved in instructional programs actually play golf independently on regulation or executive golf courses
2. Most programs specify a progression of instruction from functional assessment to actual playing after instruction.
3. A major problem was the lack of staff, volunteers, and personal time to devote to instruction and to actually getting their clients out to play independently on regulation or executive golf courses.
4. Most instructors include information about etiquette, pace of play, and "getting around the course" in their programs.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Organizations' observations about the game of golf and people with disabilities**

<b><u>General statement</u></b>	<b><u>% of respondents</u></b>
People with disabilities lack confidence or are apprehensive-fearful of golf (fear of the unknown)	100%
Golf course operators need more information and education about golfers with disabilities	72%
Golf course operators have a major concern about damage to the course by mobility devices	61%
Golf course operators have a major concern about pace of play of golfers with disabilities	56%
There is a need for more therapists to teach and encourage people with disabilities to play	56%
More information is needed for both golf personnel and people with disabilities about single rider carts and other adaptive golf equipment	44%
There needs to be more marketing about golf for people with disabilities to both golf course operators and people with disabilities	39%
Golfers are concerned about attitudes of golf course staff and other golfers towards them	33%
Golf courses need objective information; research data and want to know what others are doing	28%
There needs to be consistent policies across the country regarding golfers with disabilities	22%
Golf course operators fear of the unknown, liability & don't want to offend people with disabilities	17%
Courses need to be certified as accessible; assistance is needed in making courses accessible	11%

## **Discussion of major input received from all three study groups**

While the preceding tables indicate that there are major issues about the number of people with disabilities playing golf and some of the reasons why they may not play, the primary purpose of this study was to determine what information might be useful to golf courses in providing better customer service to golfers with disabilities. Therefore, information on the following table comparing input specific to golf courses was extracted.

In comparing the results of the various surveys and interviews, it is obvious that by far the three major issues that were of importance to all study participants were:

- ◆ Provision of information and educational opportunities for golf course personnel to learn more about people with disabilities and how to effectively accommodate golfers with mobility impairments at golf facilities and courses
- ◆ Mobility device impact on the golf course, particularly the greens surfaces
- ◆ Pace of play considerations, as it may impact the economics of the golf facility

The variations in responses among the three major groups suggest that:

1. All three groups consider education and information the most important factor in making the golf experience positive for all.
2. Golf Course operators are very interested/concerned about the physical aspects of making their facilities and course accessible, whereas that is not a major issue with golfers with disabilities or organizations providing services for them.
3. All recognize the need to insure that mobility devices on the course and that pace of play by golfers with disabilities minimize the economic impact on the course owner/operator. The results also suggest that much more information and research is needed to provide accurate data on economic impact (if any) in order to assist golf courses in developing objective based policies concerning golfers who use mobility devices.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PERCENTAGES OF COMMON INPUT AMONG ALL STUDY GROUPS/PARTICIPANTS**

<b>General Statement</b>	<b>Golf course owners-operators</b>	<b>Golfers with mobility impairments</b>	<b>Organiz. providing instruction</b>
Golf course personnel need more information and education on golfers with disabilities	<b>92%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>
Golf courses need information about making their course and facilities accessible	<b>96%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Golf course owner/operator concerns about mobility devices on the course	<b>87%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>61%</b>
Golf course owner/operator concerns about pace of play	<b>78%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>56%</b>
Golf courses want objective research data on impact of mobility devices	<b>71%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Golf courses want and/or need more information about single rider golf cars	<b>57%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>44%</b>

## **MAJOR CONCLUSIONS**

1. Information and education of the golf industry about people with disabilities and golfers with disabilities remains minimal on a national level. There is no focal point or single organization that is currently serving as a clearing house for comprehensive and authoritative information on this subject. Numerous organizations and individuals across the country serve as excellent resources for their community but are mostly focused on the characteristics of their own client group or for their local area.
2. On a national level, golf course owners/operators have not seen enough golfers with disabilities, and especially those with mobility impairments, to become interested or concerned about them.
3. When asked, golf course owners/operators are generally receptive to learning more about how to effectively accommodate golfers with disabilities. They do not, however, know how to do it, how golfers who use assistive devices play the game and in some cases question why golfers with disabilities want to play golf.
4. Many of the golf course owners/operators observations and concerns about golfers with disabilities are not based on fact, but on conjecture, since they have not generally experienced golfers who use mobility devices using their facilities or courses. There appears to be widespread misconception and stereotyping of golfers with disabilities.
5. Golf course owners/operators opinions about the adverse affect of golfers with disabilities on their operations (assistive device impact and pace of play) are not based on direct observation or experience.
6. There is a need to provide golf courses with objective information and data relative to the characteristics of golfers with mobility impairments, how they play the game, the types of devices they use, and how those devices affect play and the golf course.
7. Research is needed to provide authoritative and objective information to golf courses on mobility device impact, pace of play, and single rider golf cars.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*For the good of the game... a report on the status of golfers with disabilities in America*

Page 23 of 25

---

8. Marketing to the golf industry, to providers of services to people with disabilities, and to people with disabilities is needed in order to increase the number of people with disabilities who play golf. Marketing should include information on technology, assistive devices and equipment that enhances the ability for those with mobility impairments to effectively play.
9. There is a need for an organization, based within the golf industry, to develop comprehensive golf instructional programs for golf professionals, golf course staff and for people involved in the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. If this organization is not based within the golf industry, their participation and support is critical to its success.
10. There is a need for a golf industry-wide commitment to promote the game to new golfers, including those with disabilities, and to focus on overcoming the stigma that accompanies the game relative to making new golfers feel welcome and less intimidated. As Jim Ritts, then LPGA Commissioner said during the 1999 Golf Course Superintendent's Association conference<sup>4</sup>, "...there is a need to change the golf course culture. It is necessary to make it more friendly and inviting... particularly for new players". He further stated that; "new golfers don't know what to expect and that the golf course feels like a hostile environment..." If that is true for golfers without disabilities, imagine how an individual with a disability must feel when going to the golf course for the first time.

## **Major Recommendations**

1. Golf organizations (PGA, LPGA, USGA, NGF, GCOAA, GCSAA) that provide education of industry wide personnel, should undertake a **major** initiative to include integral components regarding golfers with disabilities in their educational programs. These initiatives must include more than educational sessions at industry related conferences, conventions, and seminars. They should be integrated into certification, instruction, and continuing education programs. These should include apprentice programs, university based programs, junior golf programs, and other industry based development programs.
2. Golf media, (print, electronic, and visual), should commit to consistent coverage of issues and facts about golfers with disabilities. They should cease or at least limit publishing “feel good” stories that sensationalize the accomplishments of golfers with disabilities beyond what they would publish about golfers without disabilities. These types of stories only tend to perpetuate stereotypes.
3. Educational materials that focus on customer service related to golfers with disabilities should be produced and made available to all golf facilities in the USA. These materials should focus on specific ways to effectively accommodate golfers with disabilities, such as how to set up the course for easier playability; how to eliminate physical barriers on the course and in and around the practice and built facilities; case studies of how other golf courses have and are successfully including golfers with disabilities; and instructional tips and information on to how to locate resources such as single rider golf cars and equipment.
4. Definitive research should be funded on pace of play, impact of wheeled and other mobility devices on the course; single rider golf cars, effective instructional techniques; equipment effectiveness, and product testing. To be effective, this research should be conducted by an independent agency which is not a stakeholder in the outcomes, but should be done so in consultation with entities that are stakeholders.
5. A site assessment tool should be developed that would provide golf course and facility managers with the ability to conduct physical assessments of their properties to insure compliance with accessibility legislation.



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*For the good of the game... a report on the status of golfers with disabilities in America*

Page 25 of 25

---

6. A major information and marketing campaign should be developed and focused nationally on getting people with disabilities interested in golf. This campaign should be a combined effort of the USGA and major rehabilitation organizations in the USA, such as the Paralyzed Veterans of America; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; major children's hospitals and rehabilitation centers such as St. Jude Children's Research Hospital; and major rehabilitation centers such as the Sheppard Center and Craig Hospital.

---

<sup>1</sup> SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics, 1994

[http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/about/major/nhis\\_dis/ad292tb1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/about/major/nhis_dis/ad292tb1.htm)

<sup>2</sup> "A Strategic Perspective on the Future of Golf, The National Golf Foundation and McKinsey & Company, January 30, 1999 (page 5)

<sup>3</sup> "Survey of Golfers with Disabilities", Proceedings of the Fifth National Forum on Accessible Golf, National Center on Accessibility, Indiana University, and Clemson University, 1996

<sup>4</sup> SOURCE: Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Convention, Orlando, Florida, February 12, 1999

***Author's note: This document has summarized the major findings associated with this study. Readers should refer to the full report for detailed analysis and explanations***