

# Philadelphia's

## Big Heart

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE IS THAT THE MONIKER EXTENDS TO GOLF AS WELL WHEN IT COMES TO LENDING DISABLED GOLFERS A HELPING HAND, PHILADELPHIA ROSE TO THE TOP 40 YEARS AGO AND IS STILL THERE.

MIKE KERN



Forty years ago, Delaware County's Edgmont Country Club hosted an international blind golf tournament called "Hope for the Blind."

Pennsylvania Governor Raymond P. Shafer got behind the event and helped lure stars such as Bob Hope to show up and make it a success. Even Arnold Palmer attended.

On September 25-26, the United States Blind Golfers Association, in conjunction with the Wills Eye Health System, will be returning to Edgmont for its 62nd national championship. The stars won't be there, but 40 or so of the best blind golfers on the planet will be, which is only fitting since the Philadelphia area has ties that go way back with the USBGA.

In 1953 Bob Allman, a blind golfer and lawyer from Philadelphia, formed the



THE COACH AND THE PLAYER

organization by writing its first by-laws and then becoming its first president. He was later honored by the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association with its Most Courageous Athlete Award.

The USBGA, which conducts clinics and tournaments to help raise money for blind and vision-impaired charities throughout the country, actually traces its origins to the Veterans Administration and the close of World War II, as a means of therapy for those who had lost their sight. Minnesota's Clint Russell, who came up with the idea, won the inaugural national

title in 1946 in Southern California.

Joe Lazaro, a seven-time champion, was in the field at Edgmont four decades ago. And he'll be one of the participants in this one, too.

Event director Sheila Drummond, 52 and a resident of Lehighton, Pennsylvania, lost her sight at 28 due to complications from diabetes. She's one of the best female blind golfers in the world, although there aren't any classifications for gender. So when she competes, she does so against the men. And she still very much holds her own.

"This is going to be a very special event," Drummond says, "because of the anniversary and all that goes with it. Not only are you going to have 40 players there, but 40 coaches as well. And it can't happen without the coaches. They're the real stars. You have to be a special person to take the time and energy, even though you're not playing yourself, to go around the course helping someone else who really needs your guidance. Your fate is literally in their hands."

Or, as Bruce Hooper puts it, it's the ultimate team sport.

He knows as well as anyone. He lost his sight nearly a decade ago. Hooper, who just turned 60, reacted as many of us would. He sat around for the better part of a year, feeling sorry for himself. It's a natural reaction. Still, it's no

way to lead the rest of your life.

Then his wife Judy was on the Internet and came across a Web site for the USBGA. And just like that, everything changed for both of them.

"I'm still the one who has to make the shot," Hooper says. "But she gives me all the information I need – alignment, distance – to make a stroke. I rely entirely on her. The more you trust your coach, the better player you are."

**He, like Drummond, is at the top of his sport. A two-time national champ, he won the international crown last year in Japan and just about everything else he's entered recently.**

He's also an ambassador. In 1998, when doctors informed him what was happening with his eyes, he and his wife had no idea what the future held. In time, they became partners all over again.

"Who would have ever thought we'd be doing this," Judy says. "He wanted to give it a try. And he was hooked. I never played. Here's what used to do: Go out on the course, take a brook, get an iced tea and sit in the cart. He'd drive around, hitting the ball I'd just watch. No more. I had to learn. But we're in this together."

Hooper had worked in the golf industry for 35 years as a salesman for a major equipment company. But he didn't play nearly enough to get even remotely proficient at it.

"When I was a kid, I was good," he says. "When you're in

the business, I found out that guys who kid my job could play all the time. But if they did, they weren't there for long. I played when I had to. It's a very difficult game, even when you can see."

Amen.

Once his professional career ended, he needed other outlets. It just took awhile to find golf. Once he did there's been no holding back. It's as much about spirit and will as anything else. Yet he feels Drummond and others like her represent the true essence of their pursuit.

"What an inspiration," he says. "She can't see a thing. Yet she lives every minute out there. And there I was, saying, 'Oh, poor me.' People think golf's about watching the shot. But believe me, it isn't."

So he and Judy travel the globe, trying to spread the word. It's what keeps them going.

"I couldn't break 90 as a sighted golfer. Now, I think I'm actually better. I've changed my way of going about it. If I could see and use the techniques I'm using now, I'd probably be really good. As Sam Snead once said, we have to play our foul balls. You have to make sure you can deal with that."

As a duo. For as long as they possibly can.

"We lucked out," Judy says. "We found something we can devote our lives to. We went through a lot of things, trying to sort it all out. And if we can help others with disabilities understand what it takes, well that's something we're very passionate about."

**Additional information on the "Hope for the Blind" in 1967 visit [www.edgmont.com/bobhope](http://www.edgmont.com/bobhope)**