

# A worthwhile EXPERIENCE



Sunshine Through Golf Foundation

During the week of the BMW Championship, a small group of tour players took time out to make it a special day for a group of Sunshine Through Golf Foundation participants

By Greg Stewart

**A**s the world's top players assembled at Cog Hill Golf and Country Club prior to the start of the BMW Championship, another group of special athletes gathered nearby for a big event of their own.

On a picture-perfect day for golf, 10 Chicago-area athletes with special needs assembled Sept. 8 at the Midwest Golf House in Lemont for the seventh annual Play With A Pro Day. The event was coordinated by the Sunshine Through Golf Foundation, recognized by the USGA as the largest grassroots golf program in the country for players with special needs.

Affected by a wide range of physical and cognitive disabilities—Gerry Meyer, Michelle Thompson, Dan James, Paul Bures, Gary Anderson, Kelly Fitzgerald, Kenneth Lindsey, Paul Kozora, JoAnn Adamski and Randy Naderhaus—represented seven different special recreation associations from the Chicagoland area.

They came to play the Three-Hole Sunshine Course at Midwest Golf House and for a chance to meet the PGA Tour professionals who took time out of their pre-tournament preparation to cross Archer Avenue and play a round with them.

Six of the 70 players competing in the

PGA Tour Playoffs' BMW Championship made the trek across the street. Tim Clark, Luke Donald, Adam Scott, Kevin Strelman, Jason Dufner and Brendon de Jonge each played the three-hole course with one or two special-needs golfers.



**PGA Tour players Kevin Strelman (above) and Luke Donald (opposite page) were both inspired by playing in the event.**

It was hard to tell to whom the experience meant more.

"Most of these people either live with their parents or in a group home," said Meyer, a 49-year-old with more independence than his peers. "Participating in things like this gives them motivation, lifts them up some."

The visit appeared to lift the spirits of

the professionals as well.

"This is a blast," said Strelman, who was making his first visit to the event. "They (the Foundation) do such a nice job with this."

A Winfield native who was essentially playing a home game at Cog Hill, Strelman said he had many requests for his time during the BMW Championship week. Some of those requests, he said, had to be turned down.

"But not this one," said Strelman, who was accompanied by his parents and his caddie for the three-hole round. "I've had to say 'no' to some other things this week because you get pulled in so many directions.

"This is a half-hour when you take more out of it than you give. It's spectacular. You see the excitement of them making a putt versus the frustration of missing and it shows you what's really important in life."

Donald, a Northwestern University product who still lives in Chicago, said the day helped him relieve the pressure of playing in the FedEx Cup Playoffs. At least in terms of managing his expectations.

"When they tell me this is their favorite game, it's very heartwarming," Donald said. "Because the game is very frustrating. It gives me some perspective to see these people with difficulties in their lives, but they still come out here to enjoy playing the game."

The event also allowed a glimpse into

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the mentality of a Tour player outside the ropes, where they can enjoy themselves on the golf course, away from the spotlight.

Like when Adam Scott picked up playing partner Fitzgerald's bag and shouldered it around the Sunshine Course. Or Strelman's reaction when Lindsey drained a long par putt as pure as any Tour pro would make, then celebrated on the green with a funky strut to the hole and high-fives for everyone.

"They're having a ball and it's nice they can do that through golf," Scott said.

But the day's most poignant moments came from two golfers, who in their own way, have both overcome long odds to play the game in a fulfilling manner.

Clark, a diminutive South African who got his first PGA Tour win in May at The Players Championship, was making his third appearance at the Play With A Pro Day. He considers it a privilege and has become an ambassador of sorts, exposing other professionals to the program.

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and it's really a great experience playing with these guys," Clark said. "I did it the first year and saw the amount of joy it brings to these guys. That's really the whole reason to come back.

"That's the whole reason I do this. I've talked a few of the other guys into coming over today."

Perhaps nobody looked forward to Clark's appearance more than Bures. A 27-year-old from LaGrange Park, Paul has cerebral palsy. He is confined to a wheelchair, has very limited use of his upper body and is mostly non-verbal.

Still, with the help of his parents, Bures plays golf and likes to visit with Tour pros. He first met Clark three years ago when paired with him at this

event. He was partnered with Clark last year and made a request to play with him again.

"Paul really likes to be involved in activities and this is another way for him," said Liz Bures, Paul's mother. "But it's something all three of us can enjoy together. As a family.

"Not only does he benefit, but just as important are the people that see us out here. It opens their eyes to what's possible. There are a lot of people who don't believe he can be a golfer, but he is.

"It's nice to see their perceptions change." 🏌️

*Greg Stewart is a sports writer for the Peoria Journal Star.*