



Opportunity Abounds

Under the guidance of PGA Professional Tim Wilkes, Ms. Wheelchair International Yvette Pegues has unlocked a potentially massive way to grow the game

By Ryan Adams, PGA

Over time, golf has always had an amazing way of bringing people together from all walks of life to an experience on the course. It's a sport that overlooks how old you are, what color skin you may have or if you have a disability. It's for anyone, and everyone.

Everyone has a story of how they started the game, and Yvette Pegues' initial dive into golf all started with a simple, yet resounding question: "Can people with disabilities play golf?"

Little did Pegues know that Sandy Cross, senior director of diversity and inclusion for the PGA of America, had her answer that day in March 2015 at the Transforming Women Entrepreneurs event in Atlanta.

"Back then, I didn't have a whole lot of interest in golf, but was curious about what Sandy had to say," recalled Pegues, who suffered a traumatic brain injury and lost the use of her legs after surgery in 2011. "Sandy explained that people with disabilities could not only play golf, but that the PGA of America had an initiative for them to try the game."

Fast forward to May 19 of this year when after

coordinating with Tim Wilkes, PGA services supervisor at the PGA Tour Superstore in Kennesaw, Georgia, Pegues is hitting golf balls for the first time in her initial Get Golf Ready class.

With the help of a ParaGolfer, a versatile golf cart that allows a person to stand and strike the ball, and instruction from Wilkes, Pegues begins to learn the fundamentals of golf along with her fellow Get Golf Ready classmates.

"It was relatively seamless once we got started," recalls Pegues, who is the founder and president of Your Invisible Disability Group, and the first woman of color to win Ms. Wheelchair USA (2014) in its 17-year history. "I had to do things a little bit differently – use men's clubs (due to the angle), come in early, leave later. But we all helped each other in the class. All of us were there to learn the game, no matter what background we came from or ability we had. It was really just a group of ladies from age 17–74 who wanted to play golf."

Wilkes, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at age 13, developed a passion for golf and learned to adapt to his strengths as he grew up and eventually became a PGA Professional. Seeing Pegues succeed in multiple Get Golf Ready classes, he knows that the opportunity to teach those with disabilities has an untapped potential.

"Our goal as PGA Professionals is to offer this great game to everyone – no matter what their abilities or disabilities are," says Wilkes. "Inclusion is the goal we should have, and any programs offered should keep that in mind."

Pegues also sees a great chance for PGA Professionals to capitalize on the opportunity to teach people with disabilities. "With the 26-year anniversary of the ADA taking place just last month, it's a great opportunity for Professionals to take advantage of the resources they have available to them through the PGA of America and the National Alliance for Accessible Golf," says Pegues. "People with disabilities have the interest to play golf. They want to bring their families and play with them for a lifetime."

For PGA Professionals looking to explore options in how they can teach people with disabilities, the National Alliance for Accessible Golf (www.accessgolf.org) is a great resource.

Under the direction of PGA Professional Steve Jubb, the Alliance works jointly with the Allied Associations in golf to promote grassroots programs, train and educate Professionals, and help fund programs that are developing individuals with disabilities in an inclusive program.

Pegues, who completed her last Get Golf Ready class at City Club Marietta Golf Course in Atlanta in late June, is excited to continue her growth and will continue to share her journey learning the game on yvettepegues.com.

"People with disabilities have multiple abilities," says Pegues. "We have to be able to support them, and open up these new opportunities so they realize, just like I did, that golf can be played by anyone." ■

Georgia-based PGA Professional Tim Wilkes poses with proud Get Golf Ready student Yvette Pegues, who lost the use of her legs in 2011.