

EDITORIAL

OFFERING SPORTS VISION THERAPY IN YOUR PRACTICE

This issue of the Journal of Behavioral Optometry is devoted to golf. I trust that the articles herein will encourage you to begin or expand your practice's involvement in sports vision.

When I was in optometry school we were taught that a complete optometric case history included an evaluation of how and where the patient worked/studied and played. It was emphasized that a good optometrist would strive to solve the visual needs of the patient, including his or her environmental requirements. Behavioral optometrists, in general, focus on solving the work and study issues of their patients, but I perceive that the recreational aspect is somewhat neglected. Since good optometric care can help the athlete be more comfortable and better skilled at his/her chosen sport, optometrists who don't include sports vision in their practices are missing an opportunity.

For optometrists who are considering adding sports vision services to their practices, golf would be a good game to emphasize. A quick reference on Google.com suggests that the Chinese, Dutch, Egyptians and French can lay claim to an ancient activity much like golf.¹ The 12th century Scots are traditionally given credit for the game. Highland shepherds supposedly practiced hitting stones into rabbit holes where the famous St. Andrews golf course now sits.² The actual term "golf" is reported to come from the Scots word "goulf" meaning to strike or cuff. Whatever the origin, Scotland has always been identified with the game.

Indeed, pioneers in vision science and optometry have a long and colorful history with sports and particularly with golf. It

is noted by Wade and Swanston that two great pioneers in vision science, Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz and Peter Guthrie Tait were both introduced to golf by Sir William Thomson of Glasgow, Scotland in the 19th century.³

There are a number of reasons why this game might be desirable for the optometrist new to sports vision. I will list a few here to encourage you to consider emphasizing golf while organizing a sports vision program.

Golf might be termed as a static sport. Unlike one playing a dynamic sport (baseball, football, basketball, tennis and a host of others), the golfer begins his performance with a static near target (the ball) and a static far target (the hole location). Therefore, orientation, location and control of movement are important aspects of the game. The golfer is not constantly in motion. In fact, controlled motion, as is suggested in the papers of this issue of this *Journal*, is the essence of consistent golf.

Golf is popular and it is gender neutral. Both men and women frequent golf courses. Wikipedia estimates that there are almost 32,000 golf courses in the United States alone, and the U.S. is 7th on the list of countries if one considers golf courses per capita.¹ Although the number of players has dropped in recent years, those who play golf 25 times or more per year are 4.6 million; some 26 million people in the United States are estimated to play golf at least once yearly. Golf is not limited by the size of the city. Golf courses are almost everywhere in the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Pacific Rim.

Golf has become a great spectator sport, and it earns professional golfers significant amounts of money and fame. Who does not recognize the name of

Arnold Palmer or Tiger Woods? For the amateur golfer, the game entertains (and frustrates) countless millions around the world. Golf, to those who play, appears to be much more than a game. It becomes a passion and also a business asset. Business men and women and professionals of all types use the golf course for recreation, relaxation, business contacts, and to actually conduct business. To learn and to play golf is *the* "thing to do" for the upwardly mobile person.

Golf is an expensive sport. The novice as well as the seasoned golfer will purchase the best of equipment to help his game. Additionally, there are clubs, lessons, balls, carts, greens fees, etc. These individuals are therefore motivated and, by and large, have the means to afford the game and optimum optometric care. Golfers will go to great lengths to improve their skill. If you ask, any golfer will likely tell you that he or she would

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W.C. Maples, O.D.

be very happy to consistently “shave” a stroke or two off their game. Vision therapy providers know that a prime factor for success is the motivation of the patient. Because they are enthusiastic and motivated to improve their game, they make great vision training patients. The majority of the patients who come to optometric offices to improve their sports vision skills are usually not there because of a medically diagnosed condition. Therefore sports vision services are not normally covered by third party payers.

Optometry has been interested in the visual aspects of sports, and golf in particular, for over 30 years. A quick search of the Southern College of Optometry data base for recent books on sports vision revealed eight titles.⁴⁻¹⁰ Two additional books emphasized the relationship of vision skills to the sport of golf.^{11,12} One of the websites I reviewed listed 10 skills, in addition to the stress of the game, that are visual in nature regarding the game of golf.¹³

The practice of vision therapy for the improvement of sports performance is indeed an area where the profession should be more involved. The possibilities for sports vision are numerous.

Parents want their child to be the best hitter on the little league team. High school and college athletes striving to move to the next level are looking for the “edge,” that split second that will make them better than the competition. One can become a contracted optometrist for a high school, college or professional sports team. Ciuffreda and Wang note that although these athletes generally have visual attributes well above the norm, even a small improvement can have a huge

positive effect in performance.¹⁴ If the ideal for optometric practice is to solve the work/study and recreational needs of the patient, sports vision services allow the optometrist to practice the full extent of the profession. I encourage you to expand your horizons and your practice to include sports vision. I think you will be pleased with the results. Sports vision can be greatly rewarding for both you and the patient.

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