



Golf and Health

Case Study

From Tennis to Tees: An Inspiration to Disabled Golfers.

Cancer as a teenager left Monique Kalkman facing huge life challenges. However, rather than ending her sporting hopes, she battled to become a four-time Paralympic champion in wheelchair tennis and table tennis and a member of the International Tennis Federation Hall of Fame. Now a highly-rated golfer with a zest for the sport, read her remarkable story...

Love for tennis.

Aged five, Monique discovered her mother's wooden tennis racquet in the attic. "She put me in front of a wall (to practise). I never went away from that wall and was happy in my own company. You can play as long as you want and determine your own intensity." Inspired by Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova on TV, the Dutch girl dared to dream.



Illness strikes.

However, aged 14 in 1979, Monique noticed her weight started to drop and she began to find another beloved sport, hockey, much harder physically. Fluid between the lungs and muscle was taken away. Then her back really started to hurt and her legs started to reflex. "I lay down on the bed as the pain was getting more severe. Then in the time-frame of 10 minutes the sensation just disappeared in my legs." A month later the tumour was diagnosed. Through cancer (and paralysis from her waist down) Monique revised her dreams, fitting to her life as a wheelchair user.

Gold rush.

Yet she remained strong, notably through the support of family and friends. Only a year later, she was at home in Arnhem watching the Paralympics on TV and was duly inspired. She discovered table tennis, and soon found a way to start winning in style, blowing away the competition. Paralympics, 1984 – gold in her category, aged 19.

There were new challenges to overcome when she made the move to wheelchair tennis, but a string of titles also followed. They included gold medals in tennis at successive Paralympics, in Barcelona in 1992 and Atlanta in 1996. She also earned the crown of World No. 1 for six years.

New challenges.

After a decade of achievement, Monique found the intense level of competition and practice too demanding. She became European Product Manager for her sponsor, Sunrise Medical, in 1997, but in 2004 suffered some health problems including heart issues. After an operation and issues with neck dystonia, Monique decided she needed to find a new sport to help her physically.

Catching the golf bug.

Previously, she had taken a buggy ride on a golf course while at a tennis camp and was "amazed by the beauty of the nature" on a course, enjoying "the serenity and elegance of the sport". But, at that time, she didn't know of the paragolfer chairs that can help paraplegic players. On a trip to the driving range and then enjoying golf courses on holiday in Ireland with husband Marc, she started to see golf as a sport for her.

Paragolfer.

Monique found that using a specially designed paragolfer chair was ideal for her fitness and for her neck injury, as she could play from a standing position. Her patience gradually helped develop her golf game. "It's like building a house – you do it brick by brick."

Watching the likes of two other wheelchair golfers, Anthony Netto and Sebas Lorente, also helped, as did her willingness to spend hours on the range, making Monique the accomplished player she is today. "I'm not 23 anymore! I'm not the number turned round, 32, any more either so I have to be realistic. But I certainly want to get the maximum out of the sport."

The health benefits.

Now in her 50s, golf suits her age and lifestyle, getting out in the fresh air and using different muscles. "I have a different goal now," she said. "Tennis, for me, was all about being competitive. Golf is more of a mix of competition with huge social and health benefits. All national federations should encourage and help disabled golfers, as it is a great sport to help them physically and mentally."

The future.

Monique has developed her own 'Going for Golf' Foundation. "We need to start somewhere and we need people with a vision and I see that coming into place now. If I can be part of it, that's fantastic."

It's about giving support to other people now, just like she has enjoyed throughout her life. "I would love to help the next generation to get there (to the Paralympics). That would be so rewarding."



“ Just as Monique paved the way in tennis for those with a disability, she is in the vanguard of passionate people aiming to do the same in golf. The manner in which she plays her golf, her work with EDGA, including presentations to The R&A, and her 'Going for Golf' Foundation which helps many people in rehabilitation through golf are all fantastic. She is helping to break down barriers, to make competitive golf for those with disabilities a more attractive and likely proposition despite numerous challenges ”

TONY BENNETT, EUROPEAN DISABLED GOLF ASSOCIATION (EDGA)



EDGA is an affiliate of The R&A. It focusses on making the sport accessible to people with a disability. EDGA works with national federations to provide opportunities for individuals with disability to try golf and for those who already play that wish to be competitive with a calendar of events.

For more information, visit www.edgagolf.com

To read Monique's full profile, visit www.edgagolf.com/profiles/05-monique-kalkman/

