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Blind golfer to discuss beauty of interdependence

By Peter Jones
YourHub Contributor

Imagine the odds.

Only about 100 people are diagnosed each year with Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy, a rare genetic condition that causes fast and severe degeneration of central vision.

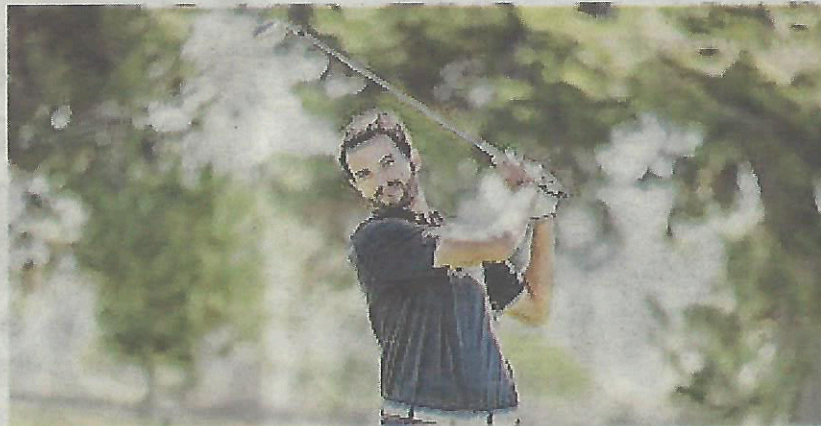
"You grow up wanting to win the lottery one day — and this is not the lottery you wanted to win. I mean, really?" said Jeremy Poincenot, who was diagnosed with Leber's a decade ago.

Not that 29-year-old Poincenot is necessarily typical of those on the unlucky end of medical chance. Although legally blind, he is a better golfer than most people with full eyesight.

"I think losing my central vision — it's weird to say it — was a great eye opener for me," he said. "I had so much at 19 and I took a lot of it for granted. Losing my central vision has made me thankful for the peripheral vision I have. It made me thankful for the amazing family I have."

One needs look no further than Poincenot's golf game for a sense of that. With help from his father, the athlete can play some of the toughest courses in the world.

In the last 10 years, Poincenot has won seven national championships, as well as the Australian Blind Open and two World Blind Championships. Since becoming a moti-



Jeremy Poincenot is legally blind, a result of Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy. He will discuss dealing with that and becoming a championship golfer on Sept. 28. Provided by Wings Over the Rockies

onational speaker, he has been featured on ABC's "20/20," CNN, ESPN and MTV. Just two years after losing his sight, he was named Challenged Athlete of the Year by the San Diego Hall of Champions.

"My dad is my guide. He lines me up with every shot. He does all the visual work," Poincenot explained. "I get to share the experience with my dad. It's interdependence at its finest. When we make a birdie, I pick the ball out of the hole and we high-five together. It's a team sport."

Poincenot will tell his story at An Evening of Hope, a benefit for Wings of Hope for Pancreatic Cancer Research, on Saturday, Sept. 28, at Glenmoor Country Club, 110 Glenmoor Drive in Cherry Hills

Village. The fundraiser will include a cocktail reception and an opportunity to meet the speaker.

"My sight is very similar to a doughnut. I'm missing the big hole," he said.

Although Poincenot went through periods of depression and self-pity, he eventually learned an important lesson from a close friend who had registered for the same college courses in hopes of helping his newly-handicapped buddy find his way around — academically and otherwise.

One day after Poincenot apologized for being a burden, he was surprised when his friend countered that Poincenot had not been a burden at all — but a blessing.

"At the time, I had no clue what

he could be getting from this," Poincenot said. "I could have done those classes on my own and probably would have been fine, but the ability to take those classes with him was meaningful and purposeful for the two of us."

Poincenot has taken much of the same formula onto the golf course with his father, who effectively acts as his son's eyes.

"When I first heard about blind golf, I thought it was a joke," the player said. "I used to be gung-ho about being as independent as possible. It took a long time to realize there's more power and beauty in interdependence."

The experience also reshaped Poincenot's "perception" on a broader level.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," he said. "I'm not able to see the cover. I'm all about experiences. What is my experience with a person — not what do they look like."

An Evening of Hope is a benefit to raise awareness and funding for pancreatic cancer research at the University of Colorado Cancer Center in Aurora. For tickets and more information, visit wingsofhopepcr.org. Wings of Hope was founded by former Castle Pines Mayor Maureen Shul in 2012 after losing both her mother and brother to pancreatic cancer within months of each other.

Peter Jones is a local writer and journalist.