

Health & Medicine

A Golf Pro's Most Valuable Lessons



Golf Pro Ben Witter,
Ben's Power Golf Learning Center

At the upcoming Lancaster Dental Implant Study Group meeting at Bent Creek, September 14, 2007, Prosthodontist Michelle Cantwell, DMD (Cantwell Dental Group), and Oral Surgeon Michael P. Eckhart, DMD (Conestoga Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery) will present to their colleagues what is perhaps their most challenging case history yet.

by Jill Kring Carter

Standing on a 75cm fitness ball, Ben Witter bounces a golf ball on a wedge, drops the wedge, grabs a driver with his other hand and strikes the ball in mid air. His drives rarely fly less than 300 yards, unless he wants them to. He can wrap a ball around a tree, left or right. He can also bring the ball back in a boomerang effect through an uncanny understanding and application of the physics of the golf swing.

Ben Witter (www.benspowergolf.com and www.ripit300.com) is internationally known and ranked for his Houdini-like "Power Golf

and his wife having just given birth to their son, Witter slipped and fell flat on his back during a trick shot at a golf outing. Driving home in severe pain, he wound up in an ER. Less than one hour later, his ruptured appendix removed, he was being pumped with antibiotics to fight the sepsis (life-threatening systemic infection) that had already set in. Follow-up CT scans of his chest and abdomen revealed a malignancy on his left lung.

Witter soon lost most of one lung. The thick layer of scar tissue around his rib cage would restrict most people's movement significantly for up to a year. Ben Witter, less than 6 weeks later, was back in nearly full-swing, filming a Golf Channel infomercial for his RIP IT 300 YARDS instructional DVD series, which had been in the works for more than a year.

Looking back, he remembers thirteen weeks in hospital with his original diagnosis, invasive and disfiguring surgery, a jaw wired shut and excruciating pain he could not escape. "I was a mean patient. I was nasty to the doctors and nurses and I didn't want visitors. I was mad at the world and felt cheated out of the life I thought I was supposed to have", he says. In the middle of all this, his mother, a nurse, brought a sand wedge and one golf ball to his hospital room. "She laid it down without a word and left it at that. She knew exactly what I needed to help me start the process of getting on with my life", he added.

An artist's tool is also his therapy, and it seems his mother knew this. "I started playing with the ball and club doing the 'tap-tap' game like Tiger Woods popularized later in the famous Nike' commercial. Next thing you know, hospital staff and patients are coming to my room wanting me to perform. Later, one of the physicians invited me to a small tournament at his country club", he says.

Witter would do anything to play golf, and to escape from the hospital on occasion. He learned that the concentration needed to play and to do his trick shots helped him escape the pain and lessened the need for pain medication. During the outing at the country club, a storm forced the players into the 19th hole. He started entertaining them with his trickery and the next thing you know, as his recovery progressed, he began performing at more and more events. Then, a friend encouraged him to start

charging for his performances, an amount which grew and grew.

Fast forward to the bone deterioration causing his prosthesis to fail. In typical Ben Witter style, he set out to find a solution. He had to. Swallowing and chewing were becoming a real issue. He was willing to go anywhere his quest led him, if he could only find a provider (and the technology) to help. A little over a year ago, he found Michael Eckhart, DMD (Conestoga Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery) and Dr. Michelle Cantwell, DMD and Prosthodontist (Cantwell Dental Group), right in his own backyard.

Because of technological advances, Witter was offered a solution (and hope) not available even 5 years ago for someone with such apparent advanced bone loss. Without procedure mapping capabilities utilizing 3D imaging technology, it would have appeared that there simply was not enough bone into which they could place dental implants that would successfully anchor a new prosthesis. With this combined new technology, his doctors can see that there is enough bone. Better, they can see exactly where the bone with the best integrity is, before surgery.

"Modern advancements in dental implant technology combined with 3D imaging offer amazing solutions that have changed Ben's life", says Dr. Cantwell. "Even the temporary prosthesis Dr. Cantwell made for me to use while the implants heal is far

better than what I had previously, both aesthetically and functionally", says Witter. After healing from the dental implants Dr. Eckhart surgically placed this past December, Witter will return to Dr. Cantwell for the permanent prosthesis. If the implants adhere as expected, they should halt the bone degeneration and offer Ben long-term results with the new prosthesis.

Dental insurance non-existent for Witter, and left with exorbitant health insurance premiums, the work of Drs. Cantwell and Eckhart is being partially subsidized by Pennsylvania's OVR (Occupational & Vocational Rehabilitation) fund. The rest is being provided, free of charge.

"My life has been a pretty interesting and challenging journey", says Witter. "I'm genuinely thankful for the technology available, and for Dr. Cantwell and Dr. Eckhart. Each day, when I wake up and look at myself in the mirror, I'm reminded of the caring and compassionate treatment I have received from them, and how much my life has been changed with their help", he says.

When not entertaining at prestigious corporate and charity golf events, he is busy giving private lessons at Bens Power Golf Learning Center, located at Fairview Golf Course on Rt. 72, just north of the Lebanon County line.

Unknowingly, never giving up may be the best lesson Ben Witter has ever offered, and the lesson is free.

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