

A CLASSIC ALL THEIR OWN

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Brandon Edge's first time on an 18-hole golf course was five years ago. The boy from Lake Worth, whose cerebral palsy prevents him from standing without assistance, crawled along the green and putted with the end of a hockey stick from his knees.

On Saturday, Edge, now 14, played a conventional course again. This time, he sported the look of any other golfer: a full compliment of clubs, a specialized golf cart that props him upright, and a tee placed behind his right ear. Edge was one of 18 children with disabilities playing in the Golf For All Classic at Lakeview Golf Club, an event that marked the first time that most of the Children's Golf Foundation's members played on a conventional 18-hole course. And for the Edge family, it means Brandon and his father, Jim, will golf together more often. "It's something we can do together," said Jim Edge, who hadn't played until his son joined the Children's Golf Foundation three years ago. "For me, it means everything. And it opens doors for Brandon." The CGF members trained at the Tam O'Shanter Teaching and Learning Center, an adaptable four-hole course at Dyer Park in West Palm Beach, before venturing to Lakeview. For 11-year-old Kyle Titsley of The Acreage, the chance to golf on a conventional course was overwhelming. The nine holes weren't enough for Titsley, who has muscular dystrophy. After finishing, he turned and looked wide-eyed at his father, Stuart, begging to golf the full 18.

"He'll be just like everybody else," Stuart Titsley said. "(The feeling) is almost euphoric. It's so important to him to be included. There's so many things that these kids are excluded from." Established in 1988 by North Palm Beach resident George McGrory, the CGF now works with 200 children and adults with disabilities per week.

Using the CGF's Tam O'Shanter course, which opened in 1999, the foundation's children are working through a seven-step certification program teaching golf technique, etiquette and scoring. "We're not trying to make good golfers," said Keith Stuhler, president and CEO of the CGF. "We're trying to make functional golfers." Once golfers from the foundation receive their certification, they can golf at JCD Sports Group's five area courses - Lakeview Golf Club, Delray Beach Golf Club, Southwinds Golf Course in Boca Raton, West Palm Beach Golf Course and Belle Glade Golf Course - at a discount. The 18 that played at Lakeview on Saturday are nearing the end of the certification program, and Stuhler expects that within the next two months, 10 of the CGF's golfers will be certified. Certification isn't only for golfers.

The Alliance for Golf Access, a partnership between the CGF and JCD Sports Group, will also certify courses that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Those courses also must train staff to be sensitive to the children's needs. "They don't want to be treated like handicapped kids," said Peter Doolittle, director of marketing for JCD Sports Group. "They want to be treated like any other golfer." And it didn't take long for the CGF golfers to prove they belonged. In the first group of the day, Mike Caramante, a mildly autistic 15-year-old from Jupiter, hit a drive of 215 yards. Mike and his father, Pat, were among the few who had golfed together on conventional courses before. For a day that saw the CGF hit its milestone, Mike fittingly hit one of his own. Asked what his son's longest all-time drive had been, Pat thought for a few seconds. Said Caramante: "That might have been it."