



DENNIS WALTER

"Every day I try to do something positive. I know most days we succeed. This is about golf, but it's a lot more than just about golf."

In the late 1960s, Walters was a promising 18-year-old making serious noise on the New Jersey amateur circuit. He won the New Jersey Junior Championship, Caddie Championship and Public Links Junior Championship, a trifecta no amateur had completed in the state. He went to North Texas State on a golf scholarship and helped them to four consecutive Missouri Valley Conference golf championships. He was gunning for the PGA TOUR, had already reached the final stage of PGA TOUR Qualifying School once, and at 24 was ready to try again after honing his skills on the South African tour and in U.S. mini-tour events.

Back home in New Jersey in July 1974, Walters went out to Roxiticus Golf Club to see his friend, former Major League Baseball pitcher, Ralph Terry. Going on a steep downhill path in a three-wheeler cart, Walters lost control and crashed the cart. When he went to get up, he couldn't. The accident dislocated a vertebra in his back and pinched his spinal cord. After several weeks in hospitals, the verdict was final: he would never walk again.

"I was so bewildered and so down and so low, I didn't know what to do," Walters told Golf Channel. "I came home to my mom and dad on the weekends, and I was sitting there in 1975 watching the Bing Crosby tournament. A lot of these guys I played with in college were playing in it.

"So I'm crying my eyes out and Dad says, 'Let's go hit some golf balls.' And I said, 'Come on, man. How am I going to do that?' And he goes, 'Out of your [expletive] wheelchair.'"

From the first ball he hit into a net in his parents' house, Walters knew that he had to find a way to continue playing the game he loved. The New Jersey and Florida golf communities rallied around him, raising money for specialized equipment including a swivel seat for his wheelchair. A year later, he paid them back with some shows of how well he could still hit the ball. For the last one, he added a twist: a trick shot off a three-foot tee. The crowd roared.

Suddenly, Walters had a new path in golf. He would have to forge it himself as the only paralyzed trick-shot artist the game had ever seen. But through determination, the loving support of his family and an incredible gift for hitting the ball that never left him, The Dennis Walters Golf Show turned into his life's work.

"I never thought I could really make a career out of this," he told Golf Channel. "I was just trying to cope with what I thought to be a hopeless situation. As rotten as I felt every place else, I felt good when I was at the golf course. For me, it was good therapy. Good mental therapy, good physical therapy."

Carrying a bag full of wild, handmade clubs and his dogs Muffin, Mulligan, Benji Hogan and Mr. Bucky, Walters has performed in all 50 states, delivering his message of hope and inspiration through a dazzling array of trick shots he happily refers to as "shots from unusual lies."



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Walters has become something of an institution in the game, doing roughly 90 shows per year. In 2008, The PGA of America presented him with its highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award. In 2018, the USGA gave him its highest honor, the Bob Jones Award. He was friendly with Ben Hogan, told dirty jokes with Sam Snead, and performed in more than 30 clinics with Tiger Woods. When it came time for putting his case in front of the World Golf Hall of Fame’s Selection Commission, none other than Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player took up the cause.

As he often says in his shows, “To me a real dream is having a positive thought in your head and in your heart, and doing whatever it takes to make that come true. If you have a dream and it doesn’t work out, never stop dreaming. Get a new dream!”