

SPORT - All the latest news from around the town

Bembenek handicap no barrier on the fairways

By Shakila Barabhuiya

FRIENDLY, positive and enthusiastic about life - these are just some of the words to describe local golfing celebrity Stan Bembenek.

However, not everybody knows his truly remarkable story that has culminated in his selection for the England disabled golf team.

Bembenek's story begins 24 years ago when he lost a leg after developing a rare form of bone cancer.

For many, losing a leg can be a traumatic experience, but to Bembenek, it was something of a relief that he wasn't going to die.

The 61-year-old, from Crowthorne, didn't let the loss of his left leg stop him from doing what he wanted to do.

In fact, he used his condition in the most positive way he could, which enabled him to excel at golf and help others in a similar situation to himself.

Bembenek, who has been a member of Sandmartins Golf Club for six years, was diagnosed with cancer of the hip joint in 1987.

After the removal of his hip, his doctor recommended taking up golf to help develop his muscles.

Having taken lessons at Sindleshaw, Bembenek discovered he had a real knack for the sport.

However, in 1991 he had to have his entire leg removed to stop the returning cancer and it wasn't until he joined Sand Martins that he took the sport more seriously.

Recalling the moment when he found out about the operation, Bembenek told the *News*: "I thought it was great.

"I thought I was a goner before, so I was actually relieved to discover I only



Get in the hole: Stan Bembenek sends a putt on its way at Sand Martins GC.

Reading Town FC, where he is currently the vice-chairman, and setting up several new companies.

He is now director of Finchampstead-based Broadband Technology 2000 and said: "I felt I had to achieve more to keep up with everyone else.

"I was told I could never walk again but there is life after losing a limb."

And his story certainly proves that, as he will be representing England in the first ever pan-disability Ryder Cup match between England and Scotland at Slaley Hall in October.

Bembenek is the only golfer from Berkshire chosen in the 16-man team but his selection is largely due to the Disabled Golf Society, which organised the qualifying tournaments.

The golf ace joined the society six months ago and has been going to their disabled tournaments ever since, including the most recent one at

a place on the team.

Speaking about his first experience at a disabled tournament, he said: "It was absolutely amazing. There were people with MS [multiple sclerosis], MD [muscular dystrophy], cerebral palsy and even a blind person. When I see how they do it, I'm amazed. It's a real eye-opener.

"They all really enjoy themselves and have a laugh."

Bembenek credits Sand Martins Golf Club for helping develop his golf and catering for his needs.

"I've been very impressed with how Sand Martins have helped disabled people," he said.

"They've been very good, they always make sure I have a buggy when I come and play."

The facilities have also improved because of Bembenek, for example the

explains: "Once the club is at the top, I swing it through fast so I'm not off balance before I hit the ball. That's the key to getting a straight ball."

He admits: "I've got good balance. I can hit it between 150 and 200 yards, which is pretty good for me."

The key to his success is the fact that he has tailored the golf clubs to suit his needs.

Bembenek can't play with irons so he bought all the woods from one to 21, specially imported from America.

His putter is also three to four inches longer than a standard one to improve his balance.

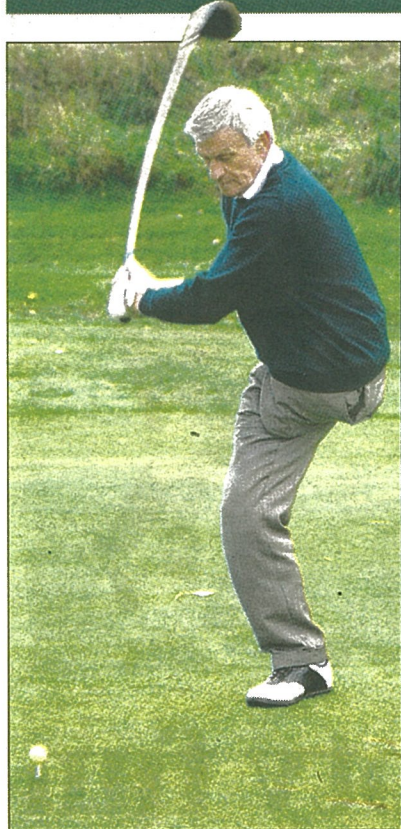
"My favourites are the number 17, which hits it about 30-40 yards, and the number seven, which goes about 150 yards."

"Because I'm leaning back, when I come down on the ball, it gives me more degrees."

He classes his strength as long-distance putting.

Bembenek's story is a true inspiration to anyone with a disability wanting to take up a sport.

His positivity is infectious, and now that he is in the England team, who knows where his journey will take him.



Tee shot: Above, Stan Bembenek on the Sandmartins course and, below, his specially adapted clubs. *Pics by Paul Johns.*



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