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The lifelong golfer played in a game-changing event for adaptive golfers

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Competition is nothing new for Evan Mathias. His latest challenge, however, was unlike anything he had experienced before.

Evan, a sales lead at a Golf Galaxy store in Indianapolis, recently competed in the inaugural U.S. Adaptive Open at the famed Pinehurst Resort Course No. 6 in North Carolina. It was a first-of-its-kind event that put adaptive golfers in the spotlight.

“This showed that anyone can go out there and play golf and play it well,” said Evan. “This really showcased the talents that are out there, and the event was great. They treated us just like we were at competing in the U.S. Open.”

Evan, who is 26 years old, was born with congenital defects in both legs, and his legs were amputated shortly after birth. Propelled by a love of sports, he racked up an incredible 10 varsity letters (four in golf, four in swimming and two in

tennis) at Jay County High School in Indiana. He went on to golf at Marian University, where he graduated with a bachelor's in exercise science and a master's in pastoral administration.

Despite competing in tournaments for nearly his entire life, the Adaptive Open was a whole new experience. From the VIP treatment on the course to pros like Tiger Woods tweeting about the event, this was on another level.

"I've been doing amputee and disabled tournaments since I was 10," said Evan. "This tournament was just tenfold what I expected. It was an incredible experience."

At the Adaptive Open, he shot 245 over three rounds to finish in 28th place in the 78-person men's field. It was a good finish, but a competitor like Evan is already strategizing and grinding to get back to the next event, which will return to Pinehurst Resort's Course No. 6 in 2023, from July 17-19.

"That first swing was probably the most nerve-wracking swing of my life," Evan said with a laugh. "Next time, I'm going to know what to expect. I'm sure a lot of people felt the same and next year, overall, I think the scores are going to be lower. I'm already working on some things."

Courtesy USGA. All Rights Reserved.

According to the USGA, the championship event is the 15th sponsored by the USGA and was open to males and females, professionals and amateurs, with either physical impairment, sensory impairment (vision), or intellectual impairment, who have a WR4GD Pass as well as an authorized World Handicap System (WHS) Handicap Index. Pinehurst Course No. 6 was chosen specifically for its friendliness to golfers with disabilities such as no forced carries, gentle bunker entrances and no curbs on cart paths, among other features. Additional accommodations were made, including multiple teeing grounds based on each golfer's impairment category.

A love of the game runs in Evan's family. His father and grandfather both hit the links; and Evan, who described himself as just a normal kid growing up, started as soon as he could. The shared passion made the Adaptive Open a family affair, as Evan's parents, extended family and his wife, Lela, made the trip. In fact, Evan and Lela celebrated their one-year wedding anniversary the Saturday before the tournament upon arriving in North Carolina.

Evan and Lela, courtesy of Evan Mathias.

From carrying on a family tradition to his personal passion that has helped him overcome challenges of his own, golf has been a constant in Evan's life -- and also a great motivator and guiding philosophy.

“Golf's a sport that has its highs and has its lows, like anything else,” said Evan. “You can always do that one thing to make it back….and it always makes you want to come back.”