

**A Thanks and Testimonial to the organisers of the John Mullins Memorial Grant, The Long Reef
Golf Course and Board & The Sargood Foundation**

Firstly, a big thank you to all who were instrumental in orchestrating a Wonderful, Inspiring and very well planned few days over the border for myself.

Before I started the few days away and after being accepted, I had to look into who the man of the grant was developed for 'John Mullins'. With the limited information I could gather I get impression that he was an incredibly community minded man that had several roles including of course President of the Long Reef Golf Club and others throughout his community. One of which was working with the Sargood Foundation and creating a tie between the two magnificent organisations.

A little information & history about me is my name is Shem Aitken, I am a Gold Coast born and bred fellow that now resides on the Sunshine Coast (A similar feeling to your wonderful part of the world). I'm a Third Generation Insurance Broker and can respect the notion of wanting to help the community which I owe so much. In May 2004 as an 18 Year old (only a year out of school) I was a passenger in a motor vehicle accident that claimed the life of the driver and left me in a wheelchair as a paraplegic. I went on to spend the next 11 Months in the Princess Alexandra Hospital Spinal Unit. Upon my return to 'Normal' life I decided to dedicate time to Personal Motivation and working with Emergency Services on their Road Safety Initiatives. Focussing on School Age children was my aim as I wasn't much older than them and felt hearing my story may help deter our youngest from putting themselves in a position of danger in the future. Moving forward I re-entered the Insurance Industry with my father as I wasn't going to let paraplegia keep me grounded. I continue my rehabilitation in some way (whether Mentally or Physically) every day I get out of bed.

The idea and premise of Disabled Golf only was made aware to me 12 or so months ago from an Organisation 'Empower Golf' head up by James Gribble, but Queensland's chapter is championed by Ben Tullipan whom I first was introduced to. I must say the first time I stood in an upright position (with the aid of the Paragolfer) with a driver in my hand looking down at the teed up ball I was about to slice into the trees, was by far one of my fondest moments of the last 15 odd years. It brought me back to my younger teen years when mum or dad would drop me off to Helensvale Golf Club after school and would walk the 18 holes with my CD Disk-man in ear thinking one day, I could be the next Greg Norman. Fast forward to today this newly found passion is alive again and has since allowed me to play in the Masters Games in Cairns last year 2019.

When I heard of the John Mullins Memorial Grant I just had to put my foot in the race, with receiving absolutely no government assistance and not being in a financial situation to even consider an opportunity like this my fingers were crossed the entire time from submitting my application to the subsequent acceptance email.

Myself and my friend flew down to Sydney, hired a car and set off to the northern beaches (which none of us had been through before), automatically I felt a sense of home with all the beaches and casual nature of the people we encountered. We arrived at Sargood and were first blown away at the location! We were greeted by the wonderful team on duty at the time and checked in. To say everything (and I mean everything) had been thought of was an understatement, there is no want or need that someone with a Spinal Cord Injury would have that is unavailable at this facility. Everything from Room Controls, Benches that go Up & Down, Bathroom, Cooking Facilities, Gym Facilities, the seemingly endless Activities on offer each day and topped off with the 180' Views of Collaroy Beach was everything you could ask for!

The time came for our first experience of Long Reef Golf Course on the Friday afternoon where we were to have lunch at the White Rock Café before meeting up with Sam Newbrun. We entered and was told to meet with a great guy by the name of Ben who would show us around, again nothing had not been thought of! The table was reserved and a beautiful lunch was had looking over the course and ocean.

We then headed out to the course and met the legend that is Sam! We fired up the Paragolfer, loaded the clubs and hit the beautiful course. We unexpectedly ended up playing the 18 holes as the afternoon's weather was perfect and I'm so grateful for that because the weather took a turn for the worse for the remainder of the weekend. Sam's Vibrant Demeanour and Passion for the game of Golf shone through immediately and really allowed me to learn some new tips and tricks to help my game of golf as well as having a great time doing it!

This experience is one that I will always remember! The people we met, the place we stayed and trip in general was perfect (except maybe the rain) however even then the rain allowed us a day to travel around and see the other sites the Northern Beaches are known for.

From the bottom of my heart I thank the organisers from Sargood for their constant communication and arranging every aspect of the trip in advance, the staff that looked after us whilst we were at Sargood, the team at Long Reef Gold Club – Ben, Sam and all the pro shop and Bar/Restaurant workers truly made it a flawless experience.

I'll finish by saying that Grants and Opportunities like this have the potential to really change peoples lives and show them things that they can only dream of doing.

So thank you again and you will definitely be having me Stay & Play Golf with you all again in the future.

Kindest Regards,



Shem Aitken

