

PGA's Rodney Green: Turning Boundaries into Blessings

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Rodney Green at the Transitions Championship 2011

It's the Transitions Championship Golf Tournament at Innisbrook, and the top names in the sport casually meander by as we wait for Rodney Green, the most prominent African American director of golf in the United States. He enters the room accompanied by a flurry of excitement, everyone clamoring to say hello to this warm and unpretentious history-maker. Green has graciously agreed to take time out of his busy schedule to speak with *Positive Impact Magazine* about his life, sport and winner mind-set.

PIM: This year marks the 50th anniversary of the ban being lifted on African American players in the PGA and here you are with this historic position. Have you ever felt that being black has been an obstacle for you in the sport?

Green: The year the Caucasian-only clause in the PGA was lifted was the year I was born. The industry has changed quite a bit in 50 years. As a kid I remember some things that may have happened because I was black, but that was in the '60s and it wasn't just in golf. African Americans were facing obstacles in many areas during that time period. Now it's about business. Establishments that still share in discriminatory practices are ultimately not going to be successful. There's also a lot more accountability now. Companies can't run the risk of being exposed for inequalities that years ago went unnoticed.

PIM: There are still relatively few African American players in the PGA. Why do you think that is?

Green: I think it's simply because of a lack of exposure, although there does seem to be much more minority involvement lately—and everyone can thank Tiger for that.

Tiger made golf cool. Back in the day, I was teased because golf just wasn't cool. They'd say "Golf? You play that old man's game?" Of course that's changed now.

PIM: Your own childhood was heavily influenced by the game, wasn't it?

Green: Yes, I was very fortunate to come from a golfing family. My uncle and my dad were both golf professionals, and I grew up on a golf course. I can't remember when I wasn't around a golf course in some way, shape or form. It probably stands to reason why I'm still involved in the game today. Back in those days I never saw anybody but black folks playing golf, so when I hear that African Americans don't play golf I say, "Yes we do. We've been doing it for a very, very long time."

PIM: What has been the biggest struggle for you personally?

Green: I refer to struggles as challenges. I've also learned that all the challenges that I've faced were in preparation for something that I was going to have to deal with further down the road. Now I just embrace everything that comes my way knowing that it's all a part of the plan. To whom much is given...much is required.

PIM: What advice do you have for young people who dream of having a professional golfing career?

Green: My advice would be to learn a little bit about everything that's going on around you. The more you know, the better your chances for advancement. The biggest difference in playing now, as opposed to the past, is how in shape these guys are. You have to hit the gym. Heck, I remember the day when you would see a guy smoking a cigarette—he'd take a drag, throw the cigarette on the ground and hit the shot. Those days are gone! Now it's power bars and sports drinks. They're eating chicken sandwiches at the turn to get protein and things like that. They're stronger and more athletic. Don't be one dimensional.

PIM: Who has been the greatest inspiration to your life?

Green: I've been blessed to have had many people who have inspired me. Obviously my parents are the backbone and the root of my foundation, but I know people like our owner Sheila Johnson, Julius (Dr. J) Erving, Ken Griffey Jr., Alonzo Mourning, Steve Harvey, and Branford Marsalis. These are people who have touched my life and still to this day allow me to reach out to them for advice, counsel, support and friendship.



Rodney Green and Sheila Johnson at the Transitions Championship 2011

Surrounding yourself with positive, successful people is an absolute necessity in life. I don't take it for granted. I'm thankful every day. As I said before...I'm blessed.

PIM: If you could look back at the end of your life, what's the legacy you'd like to leave?

Green: That's a tough question. My guess is most people who ended up being labeled as pioneers or people of influence didn't start out trying to do so. They were probably just trying to make a living and provide for their families. I'm very fortunate to be able to have a job that is also my passion. At the end of the day, it's about the love you give and the lives you touch. If I have been able to give some love and touch some lives, then I'll be all right with that as my legacy.

Rodney Green's inspiring rise to the top proves that the most influential determiners of success are passion, perseverance and integrity. He's a man who exudes a zest for life and a genuine gratitude for all he's achieved. His place in history is accentuated by the shining example he provides for the youth of today, regardless of the color of their skin—and that truly is a blessing.

Marci Wise is Positive Impact Magazine's columnist for "A Moment of Clarity." She is journalist, producer and societal visionary who has spent more than 20 years bringing people information to help them lead happier lives.