

## Community Sports

# Seeing's believing: Eye doctor lowers golfer's scores

By Michael Welton  
Tribune correspondent

Kevin Barclay has his sights set on lowering his golf score and flying commercial aircraft.

But golfers and pilots depend on near-perfect vision for peak performance, and Barclay's dreams and goals were blurred by his near-sightedness.

The America West employee was far from passing FAA vision requirements, and his 18-hole golf scores ranged from 75 to 82. So Barclay, a 1989 University of Arizona graduate, focused on his problems and called on the services of optometrist Jeffrey Eger.

But Barclay's eye exam and followup visits to Eger's Mesa office dealt with more than just a new pair of rigid gas-permeable contact lenses.

The 22-year-old found himself on the "cutting edge" of eye-care technology and involved with what Eger termed "sports vision enhancement therapy."

Eger put Barclay on his Accomotrac Vision Trainer, an electronic instrument that gauges a patient's focusing ability, and ran him through a series of sessions to help Barclay learn to improve his vision naturally by relaxing his ciliary eye muscle, which in turn reduces near-sightedness.

The machine beams an infra-red light into the eye and records the ciliary eye muscle's focusing status 40 times a second. Those measurements are converted into sound signals.

The patient, who looks into a white area surrounding an "E," can then learn to control his ciliar eye

muscle by listening to the Accomotrac's beeps. When the signals are far apart, the patient must concentrate on relaxing his ciliary muscle.

Eger calls it an "unconscious method of controlling an unconscious reaction." He requires his patients to work on the visual relaxation skills at home by concentrating on a distant white object while listening to a tape of the Accomotrac's beeps.

Many vision problems, especially near-sightedness, are caused when a person overfocuses on distant objects, Eger said. The relaxation techniques help eliminate the problem and also help the near-sighted person overcome "tunneled vision" and increase peripheral vision. The therapy also helps far-sighted patients, Eger said.

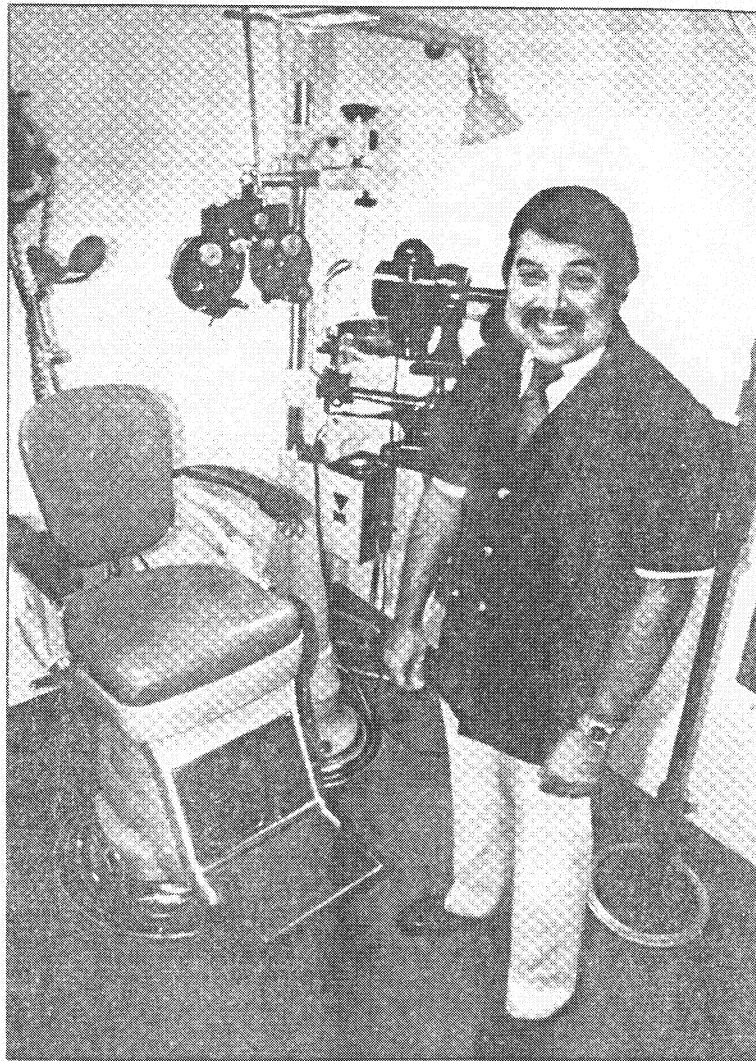
Eger also ran Barclay through a series of sessions to help improve his hand-eye coordination, his depth perception and his eye "teaming" (working each eye in tandem with the other).

Athletes have benefitted greatly from using the vision therapy techniques, Eger said. Baseball players can see pitches better with improved peripheral vision and a sharper focus on the ball's seams. Basketball players could take advantage of better depth perception and increased peripheral skills.

Barclay's results?

His golf scores have dipped nearly 10 strokes on the average since May, he said, adding that he has carded a pair of 68s this summer.

"I've found I'm really more relaxed," he said. "And my scores have dropped."



SUNDI KJENSTAD/Tribune

Dr. Jeff Eger uses advanced visual technology to help improve sports performance.

His vision has improved to 20/30 in his left eye and 20/40 in his right eye following a recent session, he said. Barclay will need near-perfect vision if he hopes to pass his physical next week and enter flight training school.

Barclay is also wearing a pair of hard contact lenses that are flatter than normal and help reshape the cornea and improve his natural eyesight.

Eger said he's sold on the concept of combining contact lenses with the visual therapy to help athletes enhance their performances.

He has four patients using the visual therapy, and a past client is commercial airline pilot David Klaue of Page, who says, in a letter to Eger, that his uncorrected vision improved from 20/400 to 20/40 in one eye and 20/70 in the other.

Eger also said he provided professional golfer Gil Morgan, a practicing optometrist before he joined the golf tour, with a special contact lens to help improve his vision while putting. Eger said he hasn't persuaded Morgan, a former classmate at optometry school, to take the visual therapy sessions yet.