

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2004

# SPORTS

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

## Golf gadget is pretty Kool for players with bad backs

*Device helps golfers place tee without bending over*

By Steve Kaminski  
The Grand Rapids Press

Brandon Hultink had been shot and was preparing for the worst.

"I was bleeding to death," Hultink said. "I was preparing myself mentally to die."

Hultink, a 1988 Grand Rapids Christian High School graduate, is a sergeant with the Battle Creek Police Department. His life changed Sept. 24, 2000, when he was called to investigate a robbery in a residential area of Battle Creek.

"We were on a call at night in the patrol car, and we went to a 3 a.m. robbery," said Hultink, 35, who is married with two children. "An innocent man called, and three guys had run through his back yard into a van. I was talking to the guy, I hear movement, and suddenly, they opened fire with semi-automatic rifles.

"It was one gang robbing the other,

and I was hit with a 7.62 millimeter. I was hit in the hip, and it tore all the way through the pelvis."

Hultink continues to experience paralysis in his left leg, just below his knee, and it's expected to be a permanent condition.

But a sense of normalcy has returned to his life. Hultink has returned to the police force, and soon, he expects to do a whole lot more golfing.

A new device, the Kool Tee, is scheduled to hit the market this fall, and it is expected to make golfing easier for players like Hultink, who have back or leg problems and often struggle to bend over.

Hultink, a member of the Battle Creek Christian Reformed Church, was talking with fellow parishioner Preston Kool about how difficult golfing can be for those with disabilities.

Hultink was preaching to the choir — Kool also has nagging back problems.

In fact, Kool had been working the past two years with Extol Inc., a Zeeland-based company, about developing a device to aid golfers. They came up with

see KOOL TEE, E8



PRESS PHOTO/ROB KURTYCZ

**Helpful hand:** Brandon Hultink, a Battle Creek police officer who was injured in the line of duty, tees up a ball with the help of the Kool Tee golf tool.

## KOOL TEE *No bending*

CONTINUED FROM E1

the Kool Tee, which enables a golfer to tee up without having to bend over.

The Kool Tee is shaped like a cane, and a golfer loads the ball and tee into one end of it, then sticks it into the ground. It releases the ball, which is snuggled on top of the tee. Once the drive is completed, a golfer can retrieve the tee by triggering a blade out of the device, which then pulls the tee out of the ground. The device also includes a claw, and that will scoop up the tee if it becomes dislodged from the ground.

If the ball dribbles off the tee during impact, no problem. The Kool Tee also features a plunger, or suction cup. Stick that onto the ball, and it picks it up.

"I have probably golfed 36 to 40 rounds with the prototype, and it has worked perfectly," said Kool, who is a former mayor of Battle Creek and a retired car dealer. "I have tried other gimmicky things, but nothing has worked like this. I would have quit by now if it wasn't for this.

"Do you know how frustrating it is to golf with others and you are constantly slowing down your group? I was always asking someone to tee my ball up, pick up the tee. I couldn't do it any more. Now I can play in a group and play up to speed."

Kool is buddies with Konrad Marcus of Holland, who is a former executive of the Prince Corporation. He holds more than 20 patents, including the lighted visor. The lifelong friends set out to work on the Kool Tee.

Marcus approached Chuck Berghuis — the CFO of Extol who attends Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville with Marcus.

"Right now we are in the process of having it patented," said Berghuis, who has taken over the sales and marketing responsibilities of the Kool Tee. "We are looking to have it out this fall, and we are expecting it to cost around \$100. This would make a nice Christmas gift for people with back and leg problems, or someone who has had a hip replacement.

"But it also can be used for preventive measures. You can use it now to avoid back problems later in life."

For more information, contact Extol at (800) 324-6205.

"This gives me total independence again," Hultink said. "I feel like I have the freedom of owning my own golf game.

"I was in a wheelchair for about six months to a year after the shooting. Why I think this is such a good product is that when I was in rehab, a lot of people like me were always saying, 'When can I get back on the golf course?'"