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# Gardner-Webb University Alum Wins Amateur Disc Golf World Championship

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Office of University  
Communications

July 27, 2017

## *Cancer Survivor AJ Carey ('17) Plans to Join Professional Disc Golf Ranks*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – In 2013, when AJ Carey ('17) was a 17-year-old senior at Crest High School (Shelby,

AJ Carey waving to the crowd

N.C.), he was diagnosed with cancer. The devastating discovery of a malignant tumor sent him into surgery and through weeks of follow-up chemo and radiation therapy. He felt the walls closing in. So, after his treatments, he found respite playing disc golf with his friends.

He discovered he really enjoyed the game. His mentor and coach, the late Dale Sollars of Bostic, N.C., told him, "One day, you'll be good." Sollars' words proved prophetic this past weekend, when Carey won the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) Amateur World Championship at West Lake Park in Davenport, Iowa.

The achievement came just two months after Carey earned a bachelor's degree in sport pedagogy from Gardner-Webb University, where his father, Dr. Bob Carey, is a professor of photojournalism and chair of the Department of Communication & New Media.

"Before my cancer diagnosis, I was going on a completely different path," Carey explained. "I was looking at a military career. That changed because cancer made me ineligible to pursue that. So it led me to embark on a different avenue."

AJ Carey on the disc golf course

Carey dabbled in the sport of disc golf in high school. He and his buddies enjoyed playing local courses at Crest, GWU, and in Bostic. But after learning about the cancer, he amped up his practice sessions. "At the time, I was stuck inside for long periods and I just wanted to get outdoors," he recalled. "I'd go to treatment, leave, and then try to go play disc golf.

"At first it was really hard, but I learned how to get through it and take it at my own pace," he shared. "Playing really kept my thoughts in a better place."

He helped launch a disc golf club at Gardner-Webb in 2014, and he joined friends on the amateur schedule a year later, playing travel tournaments wherever he could find them. He believes some of his classes helped him improve his mental game, to which he attributes much of his subsequent success.

“As a sport pedagogy major, I was able to take many classes that really helped me get to this point,” Carey offered. “One of the most influential courses was a Sports Psychology class taught by Dr. Brooke Thompson. Most of the students who take that class are thinking how to apply the information as a future coach. I actually used the information from the perspective of a current, competing athlete.”

From left: Dr. Bob Carey, AJ Carey

After winning the amateur world championship, Carey plans to keep competing and join the professional ranks. He got engaged in February and begins a new job with Innova Disc Golf in Rock Hill, S.C. “I’d like to teach kids and help athletes with their performance,” he shares. “Right now, I feel like there are many opportunities at my fingertips and I feel extremely blessed.”

Now in full remission, these days, he doesn’t consider his cancer diagnosis in quite the same way. He understands that it was all part of a much bigger picture. “At the time, I was a upset,” he admitted. “It interrupted my plans for my future in a big way. But I knew I couldn’t get bitter over the unexpected changes. Going to GWU definitely helped strengthen my faith and show me that everything I went through brought me to this point.”

Learn more about AJ Carey’s winning round [here](#).



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/7utHIRNnWN8>

*Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*