



# GOLF IN MALTA

## AN EFFORT TOWARDS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Golf was first played in Malta in 1888 but until the mid 1970's it remained, in essence, a sport played at the Royal Malta Golf Club by members of the British Forces. Under such patronage, with the majority of Club members not having a family base anchored on the Islands, it was not an ideal environment for the game to foster amongst the younger generation. As time passed it became possible for the Club to open its doors to local people and this led to the first generation of permanent residents who encouraged their offspring to enjoy the game. In fact, in those



Martin Westphal - Golf Development Consultant (centre), Henning Schuelze Doring - Resident Golf Pro (2nd from right) and William Beck - MGA President (3rd from left) with participating juniors at the Royal Malta Golf Club.



Nicholas Beck; JJ Micallef and Chris Bergedahl

days, younger players were brought into the game solely due to the efforts of their parents.

The performances of Patrick Hummel, a young 12-year-old, persuaded the 1990's Committees that juniors were an important part of the golf club's future and a policy was initiated to allow them to play competitive golf. Hummel, Malta's first junior golf ambassador, was swiftly followed by the triumvirate of Rupert Dix, Alex Denaro and Luc Schembri - the latter becoming the second junior to participate in the R&A [golf's world governing body] Junior Open Competition in Britain. The relative successes, when these

youngsters joined Club Competitions, encouraged the Committee to ask members to volunteer their personal time and effort to take fledgling players out to the practice driving range and onto the course. This first volunteer programme brought forth another triumvirate of three young players – Nicholas Beck, JJ Micallef and Chris Bergedahl - fondly considered as Malta's very own Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Arnold Palmer.

Nicholas Beck was Malta's third successive entry into the R&A Junior Open. Playing in Kilmarnock in 2004, he won his division and this trophy is the first ever silverware brought back to

our shores by a junior golfer in the local game's 116 year history. To date the only achievements to surpass this are 34-year old Andrew Borg's attempts to qualify for the Professional European Tour as well as his admirable 11th place in the Mediterranean Games held in Spain last summer.

The newly reorganized Malta Golf Association is totally committed to furthering the development of amateur golf in our country - from grass roots to competitive level. The Association is aiming to make the game of golf accessible to a young Maltese generation. The target is to develop a long term programme focusing on an initial five year plan which endeavours to make the Association autonomous for the future both in terms of knowledge gained as well as in the sustainability of the growth of the game in our country.

To this end, the R&A have generously donated 30 junior golf sets and a number of practice

driving range golf balls. Additionally, and more importantly, the governing body approved the appointment of Mr Martin Westphal to identify and implement the requirements which will enable the Association to reach its targets. Mr Westphal, one of the top ten golf development consultants in the world, visited the country this summer and, with the assistance of the resident professional Henning Schuelze Doring, set the guidelines to help the Golf Association in its activities including the development of a national team capable of participating in overseas amateur team competitions. The initial aspirations are to compete in the International Golf Federation's Eisenhower Trophy to be held in Australia in 2008 and to be part of Malta's Olympic contingent in the Mediterranean Games that will be held in Almeria in 2009.

The Malta Golf Association's criteria remains focused to take the game to a younger generation of Maltese children. With the kind

collaboration of the Malta Sports Council, the first stepping stone has been achieved and golf is now part of the "Skola Sports" programme. The concept is to take the game to sports minded schools with equipment suited for the age of the children concerned as well as for the sports facilities available. The intention is to show that golf can be fun, with colourful equipment that renders it additionally possible for the game to be used as an arithmetical learning tool for very young participants.



This will additionally involve a 'train the trainer' process whereby the physical education instructors will benefit from the golf professional's input, enabling them to teach, the students under their care, better.

The Malta Golf Association will always welcome any ideas or feedback to help achieve these milestones that target a regular attendance of 100-150 youngsters in a Junior Golf Academy that assembles regularly in proper practice grounds according to international guidelines and standards.



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