

Two other very pertinent contacts were also embraced during these twelve months – those with the International Golf Federation and with the Professional Golfers' Association of Europe.

The IGF, together with the R&A, helped the Association to structure an Anti-Doping policy document. This policy is becoming increasingly important worldwide also in golf and the Executive Council felt the need to adopt such a policy without any delay.

The IGF also encouraged participation in the World Amateur Team Championships that were held in South Africa in 2006. The Association had to decline such a kind invitation mainly as it felt that such an early participation would have not benefited the players. Given the right financial backing, as well as the development of an aspiring young team, it is hoped that Malta would be able to participate for the first time in October 2008.

The Association's first contact with the PGA's of Europe was with Mr Steve Hewitt who was instrumental to introduce Martin Westphal. A recent visit to attend a rules and tournament seminar at their headquarters at the Belfry – home of the Ryder Cup - proved helpful to cement these relationships.

Mr Ian Randall, Chief Executive, was highly supportive of the surmountable efforts. It is hoped that further assistance could be available through the Ryder Cup Trust Fund that is overseen by Ms Eve Spellar. Ms Spellar has old ties with the country being the lady that had administered the first application for Malta to join the PGA. An invitation to organise a PGA's of Europe conference in Malta was also pondered.

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IN THE HOLE

Of course, golf is primarily a game, and apart from all the administrative work, the Association is working to organise two golf tournaments annually. The first is earmarked for September this year and will be a two-day stroke play mixed competition open only for members of the MGA.

Furthermore, preparations are under way to hold the first Malta Open Amateur Championship hopefully in June 2008. Whilst the first draft of the Championship Rules has been drawn up, the Executive Council is currently involved in the massive organisational work leading up to this Championship. It is hoped that official notices hailing these tournaments will be published very shortly.

To aid the Association project its image and be in touch with its members, the final "tap in" has been to launch a website. The site has been kept modern in its outlook and as simple as possible to navigate through the various pages. This should be a source of news; tournament announcements; handicap updates; junior development programmes; documents download possibilities and a contact page.

In all that is said, in all that is done, in all that is achieved the Association depends on one major provision – the constructive criticism and input from its membership. With this first newsletter, the Executive Council has tried to impart as much information as possible as to what has been happening over these early months. It is hoped that the accomplishments are embraced in the right spirit of the game.

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MALTA GOLF ASSOCIATION

THE FIRST TWELVE MONTHS

THE PRE-ROUTINE

The Malta Golf Association has just passed through the first twelve months since the foundation meeting that launched the new image of the governing body for the sport of golf in the Maltese Islands. However, it would be inappropriate to continue without first looking back at the earlier efforts that led to the formation of the MGA.

The need to establish a governing body for the game of golf, as a sport was first felt in 1996 and a steering committee was formed with the involvement of John Holland, Alex Mangion, Maïke Beekman and Maureen Borg. The Malta Golf Federation was then instituted with the Royal Malta Golf Club as its sole "member". This was sufficient to enable the Federation to establish the first contacts with the Maltese Olympic Committee; the R&A; the International Golf Federation; the Professional Golfers Association and the Mediterranean Golf Federation. In fact it was through these first contacts that it was possible for Maltese golf to be represented four times in the R&A Junior Open Championship and twice in the Mediterranean Games.

For these valiant initial efforts the current Executive Council of the MGA is entirely indebted.

THE TAKE AWAY

Despite the fact that the game was introduced as early as 1888, it was only in the late 1970's that the game started to be taken up by the Maltese. During the first 90 years of its local history, golf was played practically exclusively by British forces high-ranking personnel who understandably neither felt the responsibility nor had the foresight to develop the game locally.

The game grew in popularity once it became increasingly possible for local residents to enjoy the facilities at the Marsa grounds. The accommodating scenario led to a membership including father and son permutations. The arrival of the first youths directed to a recognition of the importance of junior golfers. Mr Paul Stoner, incumbent chairman of the RMGC, encouraged by Playmobil, effectively spearheaded this progress.

The modest success of these first steps increasingly suggested that the function of the Malta Golf Federation had to be revamped to enable it to meet the mounting demands to promote the game locally and to strengthen foreign ties.

Initially, the constitution was re-written so as to enable the Association to function on a vigorous level both at national and international levels. Because of the unique position of the game in Malta, the constitution is now based on the affiliation of individuals by virtue of their membership in a golf club or society. In this manner all members of an affiliated golf club or society are given a say in the running of The Game in Malta. Furthermore, the functions of the MGA are totally distinct from the management of the Royal Malta Golf Club.

Additionally, the MGA constitution now provides for the eligibility and selection of players to represent Malta in international competitions, for the adoption of an anti-doping policy, for the governance of a unified handicapping system, for the responsibility of having regular general meetings as well as for the election of an Executive Council.

The adoption of the new MGA constitution, including the change of name, was possible according to provisions of the Federation's original constitution. In April 2008, the membership of the Malta Golf Association will reap the benefits of the first general meeting.

THE BACKSWING

Whilst the administrative paper work was being put into place, the logo of the MGA was also materialised. The golf ball with a "dark side" is a symbolic representation of the world and is draped with the colours of the Maltese flag. Thus the emblem in its entirety suggests the Association's responsibility of the game on a local stage within the framework of the international arena.

Most importantly, the links with the R&A were explored on a new and very significant role of the Association – that of developing the game



amongst a younger generation. Almost before the ink had dried on the draft of the new constitution, the R&A acknowledged the Association's embryonic efforts and forwarded a gift of thirty junior club sets for the Junior Academy.

The fulfilment of the requirements of the MGA's constitution mandated the election of the first Executive Council for a period of four years. The election process was held at the same time as the RMGC's Annual General Meeting of June 2006. The voting members elected Mr William Beck as President, Mr Ian Restall as Secretary, Mr John Bonello as Treasurer, Dr David Debono and Mrs Maureen Borg as members, all on a honorary appointment.

THE HIT

Relationships with St Andrews hit an all time high when our colleagues additionally approved to help the Association with its aspirations to develop the game at root level and build a budding team capable of representing the country on an international level. Mr Duncan Weir, together with his fine team responsible for the golf development programmes at the R&A, was instrumental to identify, through the Professional Golfers' Association of Europe, the professional to take the MGA forward with its development strategy.

Mr Martin Westphal, one of the top ten golf development consultants in the world, arrived for his first exploratory visit in August 2006. The visit was totally sponsored by the R&A and Mr Westphal's initial's contribution was immense in helping the Association to start formulating a way ahead to take the game to sports minded schools.



Martin Westphal with the National Team – a relaxed moment after swing analysis via computer software.

Whereas in other countries junior golf is perhaps the most important agenda for the respective associations and golf clubs, this issue remains, until now, elusive on the local scene solely because of the lack of man hours. In an effort to understand how other countries succeed in this field, the MGA attended the 2nd World Conference on Junior Golf that was hosted by the Danish Golf Federation in October 2006.

It was painfully noticeable that Malta is years behind in such programmes and a meeting with the R&A, during the conference, highlighted the necessity for the Association to grab the beacon of youth and make it glow bright if Malta was to continue to receive the desired support and encouragement.

Essentially the one club/course scenario, the absence of a championship course, the lack of an academy, the limitation of facilities, the restraint in current numbers and the absence of governmental support in favour of the sport are all aspects that hinder more positive interactions on the international scene.



Resident Professional Henning Schulze Doering with a group of aspiring golfers during the Inter Colleges Sports Festival. Henning is the backbone of the Junior Academy.

Parallel to this, the Association embarked on building up the relations with the Maltaese Olympic Committee and to be recognised by the Malta Sports Council. Regular attendance to MOC Council meetings and the Association's perceived image of seriousness and integrity facilitated the assistance from the MOC towards travel grants in 2006 and 2007 as well as for the MOC to, once more, include golf as part of the contingent representing Malta in the Mediterranean Games that will be held in Pescara in 2009. This will be the first time that Malta will be represented as a team in such games.

Furthermore, in an effort to encourage our participation and to have a valid contribution, the Association has applied for voting rights during MOC meetings.

Relations with the Malta Sports Council have also been explored and the Sports Council primarily approved a grant through the Youth Development Programme sponsored in conjunction with the Malta International Airport.

Local media readers would have noticed that golf was one of the few sports that failed to receive any direct assistance from the 2007 Assistance/Incentive Schemes. This dejection was surmounted when the Association received the Sports Council's official recognition as Malta's governing body for the sport of golf.

Another milestone in grants was achieved when, completely unexpectedly, De La Rue (Malta) endorsed a healthy sponsorship for 2007 and 2008. These funds will be utilised to cover the consultation fees for three additional visits per year by Mr Martin Westphal and will hopefully go a long way to assist the Association reach its set aspirations and targets.

THE FOLLOW THROUGH

The recognition by the Sports Council was paramount for the Association's application to become affiliated to the European Golf Association.

The awareness that Malta was the only country in Europe not affiliated to the EGA led to an informal discussion with the EGA's Secretary General during the 2006 European Youth Championships. Mr Storjohann's encouraging remarks were principal towards the Executive's decision to submit a formal application for affiliation. This will be put to the vote at the next EGA's AGM in October this year. Once approved, Malta will be able to adopt the EGA handicapping system and, with the collaboration of the RMGC, start the process to have the golf course slope rated. Additionally, Malta will be able to participate in the golf tournaments hosted under the auspices of the European Golf Association.



December 2006: The first youth exchange arranged with the Millenium Golf Club of Belgium. From left to right David; Mia; Celine; Sara; Thomas; Christopher; Nicholas; Ruud; Chris; Joet; Veronique; William