

# Golf

VICTORIA

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 GolfVictoria

August/September 2018  
Volume 59 - Number 4

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**golf n.**

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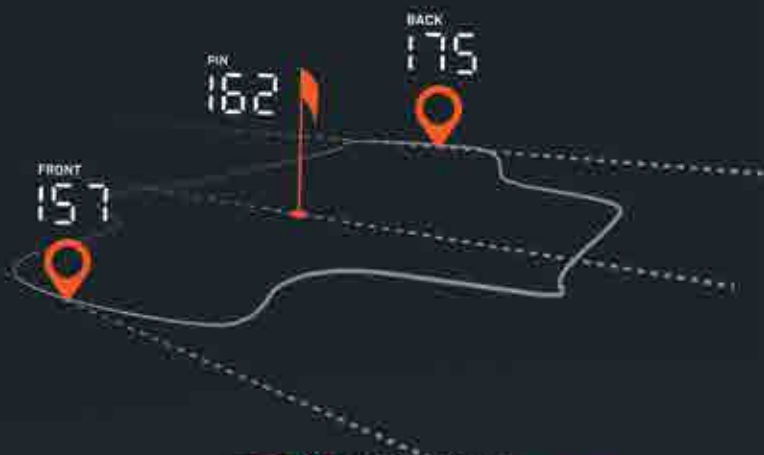
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Photo: Daniel Pockett

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**MARKETING &  
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER**  
Greg Oakford

**Golf  
VICTORIA**

is published by Golf Victoria

### MANAGING EDITORS

Mark Harding  
Mob: 0417 105 659  
Email: mark@hardingmedia.com.au

Karen Harding  
Mob: 0421 040 580  
Email: karen@hardingmedia.com.au

### ADVERTISING:

Ray Kelsall  
Mob: 0408 196 729  
Email: rgkelsall@bigpond.com.au

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

All enquiries to Anne Maddock  
Tel: (03) 8545 6200  
Email: anne.maddock@golfvic.org.au

### GOLF VICTORIA

Level 1, 47A Wangara Road,  
Cheltenham VIC 3192  
PO Box 2168 Hampton East VIC 3188  
Tel: (03) 8545 6200  
Fax: (03) 9543 9307  
Email: info@golfvic.org.au

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# For The Love Of The Game

As this edition of Golf Victoria magazine was nearing completion, the heartbreaking news came through of the death of Victoria's much-loved golfer Jarrod Lyle, after a battle of almost 20 years against the effects of acute myeloid leukaemia.

It is dreadful that anyone should be stricken with this cruel disease. It is particularly poignant within the golfing community that it be a 36-year-old father of two very young daughters, a man who distinguished himself with courage, generosity and an infectious love of life as he succeeded as an elite professional athlete despite incredible odds.

**It is difficult to imagine a sadder, more emotional time for Victorian and Australian golf. But, not surprisingly, it has also been the period where the sport has been seen at its best.**

Coming so soon after the passing of Victoria's greatest ever golfer, Peter Thomson, and fellow Victorian Golf Hall of Fame member, Ian Stanley, it is difficult to imagine a sadder, more emotional time for Victorian and Australian golf. But, not surprisingly, it has also been the period where the sport has been seen at its best.

We often refer to the golf community as a family because of the unity and the common bond the game inspires. Like a family, we came together to mourn the passing and celebrate the life of Peter Thomson after he lost his four-year struggle with Parkinson's Disease, at the age of 88, in June.

Peter's contribution to the game, particularly in his home state, was so much greater than his five Open Championships or his three Australian Opens. In one of the tributes to him in

this edition, Mike Clayton so accurately described him as the conscience of golf.

Certainly, there were many administrators down the years who benefitted from his wisdom and when we play the \$3 million Vic Open at 13th Beach next February, you can be assured that Peter Thomson, as a three-time winner of our state open, will be appropriately acknowledged.

In late July, we lost another much-loved Vic Open winner, Ian Stanley, who as a two-time Victorian Junior Champion in the 1960s idolised Thommo and grew up to win on the European Tour and 19 times on the Australasian Tour. Ian played in a halcyon era for our local tour and was enormously popular with galleries and a real personality of the game. He died at 69 after a battle with cancer which he faced with enormous dignity, courage and realism.

Those same qualities were mirrored in Jarrod's battle, waged in a more public arena since Victorians took him to their hearts when, as a teenager, he first learned he was suffering from leukaemia.

There simply hasn't been a more popular figure on the modern professional tour, both here and in the US – and that's the testimony of an astonishing number of golfers around the world who sent messages of support to Jarrod and his family in the final days of his life.

Throughout Australia and, in particular, his home state, the public responded and showed Jarrod, wife Briony and their children just how much his plight and attitude to life had touched them. In an interview played on *Inside the Ropes* just days after he entered palliative care, Jarrod returned the sentiment, telling Mark Hayes that he considered himself "the luckiest golfer alive" to have received such support from all corners of the golf community. Just that alone showed the heart of the man.

Special mention should also be given to radio station 1116 SEN which quickly set up a radiothon, declaring "Jarrod Lyle Day" and raising \$178,000 for the Lyle family trust to support Briony, Lusi and Jemma.

Peter Thomson, Ian Stanley and Jarrod Lyle were each wonderful ambassadors for golf and they all had something in common. A true and deep love for the game. And this is something we all share with them, regardless of our standard of play.

In this issue, it is fitting we show how much golf means to the people who play it, from nine-year-old Zac Herft on our cover to 90-year-old Betty Higgs, who crossed the Nullarbor playing golf for her birthday. Nicolette Proctor, Mike Sheahan, James Lavender, Helen Pascoe, Ian McCleary, Adam Tsiamis and the many golfers featured in our Longest Day story all demonstrate that golf is not only a game for life but a game that is a meaningful part of the lives of so many.

**For persons wishing to donate to the Lyle family, either directly or via the cancer charity Challenge, details are on the Golf Victoria website at:**  
**[www.golfvic.org.au/lylefamily](http://www.golfvic.org.au/lylefamily)**



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*Jack Wilson, Premier Daniel Andrews and Stacey Peters spell out the good news for the Vic Open at 13th Beach*



# EXCITING TIMES!

**The State Government announcement in June of a massive increase in prizemoney for the Vic Open from 2019 to 2022 has given the tournament an opportunity to make even greater strides on the world stage. MARK HARDING reports.**

The money is just the start!

Three million dollars spelled out in golf balls on the grass at 13th Beach in June not only celebrated the incredible growth of the Vic Open over the last six years, but signalled that the future is set to be even more exciting.

The only tournament in the world where men and women compete for equal prizemoney on the same course at the same time has had an extraordinary growth chart since the two State Opens were joined in 2012.

2019 is set to be its biggest leap so far and comes in an environment when the other tours around the world are open to change.

The Vision 2025 project in Australia is part of a global acknowledgement that more must be done to attract women to golf – and in the Vic Open, Golf Victoria has already established an event which puts it ahead of the rest of the world. There's now a genuine opportunity to make the week down on the Bellarine Peninsula a unique celebration of golf attracting players from all over – yes, even the US.

Soon after Premier Daniel Andrews announced the State Government backing of the Vic Open at the Beach and Creek courses of 13th Beach for the next four years, Golf Victoria Chief Executive Simon Brookhouse and Marketing and Communications Manager Greg Oakford

headed overseas to sell the tournament to the rest of the golfing world.

On one hand, an easy sell – because, almost to a man and woman, anyone who has played in the event since it moved down to 13th Beach in 2013 has sung the praises of the course, the ambience and the ground-breaking gender mix.

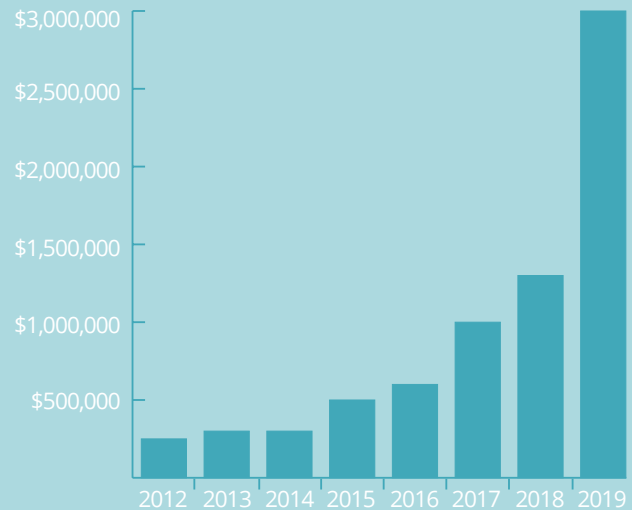
"It was wonderful to hear such positive feedback about the Vic Open's growth," Brookhouse said of the trip. "Many players and golf industry professionals were commenting on the significant increase in prizemoney to \$3 million and what this will do in terms of generating further growth for the event and, more broadly, Australian golf."

"We know the format is a winner and continuing to have equal prizemoney for both the men and women is something that is certainly a talking point across the globe."

# TOURNAMENT OF GROWTH

At Spring Valley/Woodlands 2012

At 13th Beach 2013-2018



But breaking into the big league, as the tournament is trying to do, means there are more Ts to be crossed and more Is to be dotted when making deals to grow it internationally.

To assume extra prizemoney is all it takes to make a successful event is to denigrate the long-term strategy that has gone into making the Vic Open the most lucrative and exciting week of golf on the Australian calendar. A week that now clearly has the attention and co-operation of Europe and has at least come on to the radar of the US.

The growth of the Vic Open began with the noble vision to showcase men's and women's golf equally. Back then, at Spring Valley and Woodlands in 2012, with prizemoney of \$125,000 for men and the same for women, it was seen as an innovative demonstration of the game's greatest quality – that everyone can play together.

When that modest start was so successful, the next step was the inspired move to the Bellarine Peninsula and the dual courses of 13th Beach, where it soon became apparent that the tournament had struck a chord with players, locals and holidaymakers. The prizemoney then was \$150,000 each and everyone thought it was a 'terrific little tournament'.

Not quite so little by 2015 when it became the Oates Vic Open worth \$250,000 for the men and \$250,000 for the women and footage of Richard Green scoring a hole-in-one, through the bunker, on the par four 15th in the pro-am began to trend on social media.

The next year, live streaming of the event became the first important step towards international awareness. That awareness

was helped when young Englishwoman Georgia Hall and New Zealander Michael Long both won. It was Hall's first and only win until her grand victory in this year's Women's British Open.

After 2016 the development was spectacular, starting with co-sanctioning of the 2017 event by the Ladies European Tour (LET), with established world players Mel Reid and Sandra Gal staging a thrilling marathon playoff.

It was then that Brookhouse put out the first serious feelers to the European Tour for co-sanctioning of the men's event. Meanwhile, the live stream had increased 500 per cent from its debut season and it was clear the tournament was going places.

**“MANY PLAYERS AND GOLF INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS WERE COMMENTING ON THE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN PRIZEMONEY TO \$3 MILLION AND WHAT THIS WILL DO IN TERMS OF GENERATING FURTHER GROWTH FOR THE EVENT AND, MORE BROADLY, AUSTRALIAN GOLF.”**

With the LET players singing the Vic Open's praises, the next step was to expand the television coverage, with the 2018 tournament going to 77 countries including the Golf Channel in the US, Canada, South America and France, with other broadcasters through Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Coupled with the growth of the ISPS HANDA World Super 6 in Perth a week after the Vic Open, the case for men's European Tour co-sanctioning became compelling.

But it wasn't as simple as you might think. For example, it was one thing for Golf Victoria to organise live streaming as they did before there was any co-sanctioning and therefore no broadcast contracts. But when the LET and the European Tours both have separate television deals, it becomes a slower process to work through the politics and find a way to broadcast both men and women on the same course.

The extra prizemoney will enhance the tournament's ability to attract bigger names but it can't yet hope to lure the Rorys, Justins, Dustins and Jordans of the world. And we're not even mentioning the singular Tiger.

But by selling Victoria's other assets, some from the next tier down might well be lured to combine a world class surfing break with a trip Down Under to play golf.

At \$3 million – or \$1.5 million for men and \$1.5 million for women – the Vic Open becomes even more palatable for the European women. Compared to the 2018 LET schedule, only the LPGA co-sanctioned events the British Open, Scottish Open and the Evian Championship are worth more.

Compared to the men's European Tour, the prizemoney is still at the low end but is at least the equal of nine events on the 2018 schedule and when linked with the World Super 6 event, it makes the long trip to Australia worthwhile.

The State Government guarantee to 2022 has given Golf Victoria and Golf Australia the opportunity to do something very special.

The hard work starts now.

# THE BOY WHO BECAME... A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

The passing of Jarrod Lyle has impacted on golf around the world but particularly in his home state. **MARK HARDING** pays tribute.

*Photo by Ray Sizer*





In 1999, Shepparton High School had the best school golf team in the state – not really a surprise, given it was led by 17-year-old Jarrod Lyle and ably supported by his younger brother Leighton.

A few days after their win in a State Schools Championship, Jarrod was back home when he received two phone calls within half an hour. The first informed him that his performances had earned him promotion from the Commonwealth Golf Club colts' pennant team into the senior team.

The second call was from his doctor, informing him that the results from some blood tests indicated he should enter hospital straight away for treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia.

One of the cruellest parts of Jarrod's almost 20-year battle with cancer was that the three times it struck seemed to coincide with periods of his life when everything seemed to be going so great.

His nine months in the cancer ward of the Royal Children's Hospital at the turn of the century has been well documented, the inspiration and friendship of Robert Allenby during that time now a part of Australian golfing folklore.

Even then, Jarrod was displaying the generosity of spirit and love of life that so endeared him to the Australian public. Just before he turned pro at the end of 2004, in a story by former Golf Victoria Magazine editor Brian Meldrum, Jarrod recalled one of the worst memories of that time was not his own pain but the suffering of the younger children in the ward. "I'd lie in bed at night crying at that," he said. "These little two and three-year-old kids would see the doctors and nurses approaching with needles and they'd start crying because they knew what was going to happen would make them crook. They knew what was happening to them but they didn't know why."

**"I feel like I am the luckiest golfer going around because so many people took an interest in me. And took an interest in, I guess, my fight. To have so many friends around the world, it is a great feeling. It is going to be hard to leave that behind but they know that I love 'em. They know that all the fighting that I did do was to get back out and play golf again. It's going to be hard but at some point it's going to happen and ... and they will get on with their lives. It's just ... yeah, I just feel very, very lucky." – Jarrod Lyle, August 2018.**

With Allenby's encouragement, Jarrod recovered to not only make it back to golf but was able to carve a superb amateur career. He earned a VIS scholarship, won the Lake Macquarie Amateur two years in a row, the Victorian Country Championship two years in a row, was runner-up in the Australia Amateur, was a member of Commonwealth's winning 2004 pennant team (with Marc Leishman), made the state team and then Australia's Eisenhower Cup team.

He was quick to suggest that his leukaemia ordeal had helped his golf. He also believed it had made him a better person. After all, there wasn't much point letting a poor lie, an unlucky bounce or a three-putt upset you when you had survived a brush with death.

But it wasn't just that. It was obvious Jarrod would have had the same beaming love of the game, and love of people, regardless of his health.

As he made his way in his pro career, his leukaemia backstory was mentioned prominently in almost every article or report but Jarrod cheerfully answered the same questions over and over, well aware the message was positive and could benefit Challenge, the charity with which he and Allenby became synonymous.

He became a gallery favourite. Quickly.

The Heineken Classic of 2005 at Royal Melbourne was just his fifth professional start but showed the rapport he had with golf fans. When he birdied the 12th hole in the third round on the Saturday, he was not only six under par for the day but had taken a two-shot lead. Striding down from the elevated green to the 13th tee, he accepted high-fives from the crowd with a joyous look on his face and was stopped by a volunteer who wanted to tell him about his grandson. After hitting his drive on the 13th, he called the volunteer over again and continued the conversation.

There have been many bigger tournaments on the magnificent composite course and many bigger stars producing many more historic moments than this moment. But it is doubtful any of those stars have been so 'of the people' that Jarrod was on this day and so many other days.

Like Scottsdale six years later. The YouTube footage of his 2011 hole-in-one on the famous party hole just has to bring a smile to anyone's face ... the big fella raising his arms, a 'you bewdy' shouted to his caddy, sandwiched by an expletive, then the arms raised again to command the crowd to keep cheering.

A year later he finished fourth in the Northern Trust Open, his best finish on the PGA Tour and a signal that he was at home on the tour, among friends. In the 11 years since his recovery, he'd won twice on the US secondary tour, got his US PGA card, lost it a couple of times but kept getting it back and having another crack.

He'd married Briony. And the birth of his first child, Lusi, was imminent.

The very next week after Scottsdale in Mexico, he was bitten by a mosquito and couldn't get rid of a big lump which came up as a result.

His fears and what happened next have been documented in a tribute to Jarrod by

*Jarrod Lyle's last competitive appearance in his home state was the 2017 Vic Open.*





*Back-to-back State Country Championship wins for a young Jarrod Lyle.*

Allenby on the Players Voice website and it's a compelling account, including the joy of holding his newborn baby and the despair of having to leave her to enter treatment.

Leukaemia had come back, but even after this second bout and second round of chemotherapy, Jarrod returned to golf and produced another example of his incredible pull with the patrons.

Geoff Ogilvy, his playing partner for round one of his comeback event, the 2013 Talisker Masters at Royal Melbourne, rated Jarrod's tearful walk to the first tee as the crowd cheered him, and then watching him tee off, still crying, as one of the most unbelievable experiences of his golf career. "Nothing's been like that first tee experience for me," Ogilvy said.

Allenby wrote: "I rate his comeback at the Masters at Royal Melbourne in 2013 as one of the most courageous acts in sports history."

Three over after 12 holes on day one, it seemed logical Jarrod would miss the cut. But he rallied late with a couple of birdies and next day got inside the number. Of course, fulfilling his cut ambition meant he had to play four days in a row and by Sunday he was spent. He finished bogey, bogey, bogey and shot an eight-over 79, walking from the green exhausted.

But it was glorious.

A sea of yellow from wife Briony, daughter Lusi and his army of Challenge supporters greeted him and though he was far from full fitness, he began to dream again of making it back to the PGA Tour.

He had a medical exemption which would guarantee him at least seven starts in which he had to earn enough to keep his card but he wanted to supplement those starts with some sponsor invites.

He began his comeback with a warm up on the Web.com tour, finishing a highly



*Jarrod Lyle's most famous shot.*

creditable tied-11th and planned his PGA Tour return for the Frys.com Open in October 2014. But the organisers declined his request for a sponsors' invite, so with trademark Jarrod resilience he went to Monday Qualifying. He shot 66 and then won an eight-man playoff for one of four spots in the field. "What better way to stick it up them," he said.

He made the cut, finishing tied 31st and made the cut again in his next tournament. But, after all the stops and starts and health issues, it wasn't really surprising that he couldn't hit his medical exemption target.

He continued the quest on sponsors' invites and while the bare statistics would say making five cuts in 20 events was unsuccessful, the bare statistics have never told Jarrod's story. In truth, making the cut on the US PGA tour five times was incredible!

In May 2016, Briony gave birth to their second daughter Jemma and Jarrod began to come to terms with the fact that the PGA Tour had passed him by. He announced in September 2016 that he would return to Australia to live.

Back home he played eight times at the end of 2016 and early 2017, making the cut in all but one. He and Briony set up Lyle Apparel, he was active in Challenge fundraising, turned his hand to some television commentary and began contributing to Golf Victoria Magazine.

And then for the third time he became ill. This time there would be no miracle recovery.

Jarrod died on August 8, aged 36, a life not defined by his illness, nor even by his golf, but by his open-armed approach to life and all around him. We can picture him with hands raised high and wide conducting the orchestra at Scottsdale, or high-fiving the crowd at the Heineken Classic. And the most poignant image of all, on the front page of his website, as a father preparing to sweep his daughter into his open arms.



*The home page of Jarrod's website.*

# 'STAN' HAD A *flair for fun*

With big hair, a big moustache and an even bigger personality, Ian Stanley was one of the best and most popular players in one of the greatest eras of Australian golf.

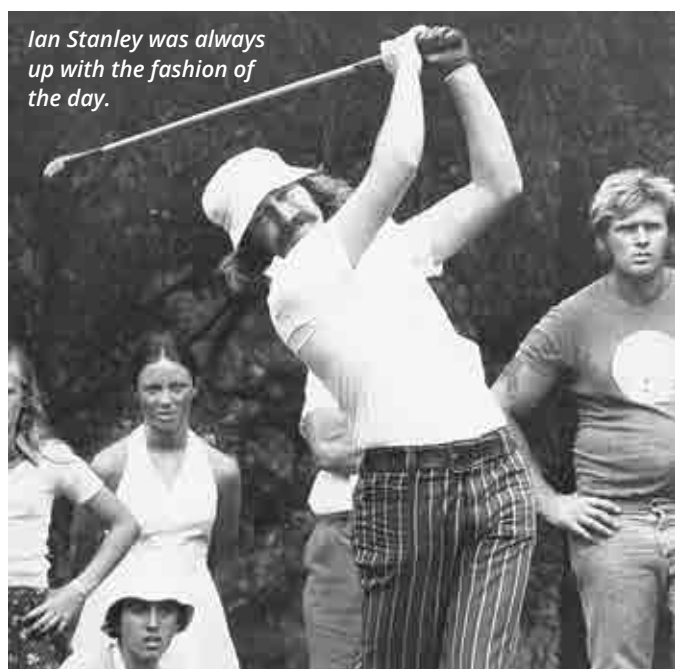
Stanley, who died in July after a three-year battle with cancer, won 19 times on the Australasian Tour – from the 1975 Queensland Open to the 1992 Victorian Open. In between, there were state opens in New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania and the South Australian and Victorian PGAs.

Although the biggest tournaments eluded him, he was a frequent contender on the leaderboard in an era where golf boomed, largely thanks to Greg Norman but also because of a growing number of other talented players like Bob Shearer, Jack Newton, Stewart Ginn and Stanley.

In a remarkably honest article in *Australian Golf Digest* shortly before his death, Stanley admitted that concentration was his biggest issue in falling short in the big ones.

He was equal third in the 1975 Australian Open won by Jack Nicklaus and three times third in the Australian Masters.

But he did manage a win on the European Tour, in the Martini International, sharing a victory with Christy O'Connor Jnr when



*Ian Stanley was always up with the fashion of the day.*



*Ian Stanley on his way to victory in the 2001 British Senior Open.*

*Photo: Getty Images*

there was no playoff. The Martini also boasts Peter Thomson twice, Greg Norman three times, Seve Ballesteros and Nick Faldo on its honour roll, so while it is no longer played it was a seriously good title to win in its day.

Stanley played for seven years on the European Tour, forming a kind of Aussie Rat Pack with Shearer, Newton, Ginn and other Australians who floated in and out. They became known for their fine play on the course and for playing hard off it.

"The English could not understand us; how we could party and then go out and win the tournament," he said.

There's no doubt, though, that Stanley matured well. He won the Victorian Open at Woodlands at 44 and when he turned 50 he hit the European Seniors Tour with the help of a sports psychologist.

It helped him concentrate all the way through four rounds and a playoff with Bob Charles before winning the 2001 British Senior Open, just a few weeks after winning the Seniors PGA.

Stanley's inspiration growing up was Peter Thomson. He won the Victorian Schoolboys Championship the year after Thomson's fifth British Open win and was State Junior Champion twice and club champion at Huntingdale before serving a traineeship in the club pro shop.

When he retired from touring he got a job with Thomson, working in golf course design. He also did golf television commentary and gave his time freely for several charities.

Notably, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Jack Newton Trust and was a founding director of Tee Up For Kids, helping underprivileged children.

With success at junior, elite and senior levels, working in media and design, and continuing to give back throughout his life, Ian Stanley was a logical inductee to the Victorian Golf Hall of Fame in 2012.

# A Round Well Played

**Five-time British Open winner, golf course designer, writer and, without question, the greatest figure in Victorian golf history, Peter Thomson died in June after a four-year battle with Parkinson's Disease. STEVE PERKIN, who co-authored his book with him, pays tribute.**

At the memorial service to recognise Peter Thomson's death at the age of 88, perhaps the most poignant insight into the man came from his close friend Ranald Macdonald.

A fine golfer himself, Macdonald recalled hosting a dinner party where one of the female guests, who had been sitting next to Thomson, remarked after he'd left that she'd enjoyed his company immensely but she had no idea he was a golfer.

"He never mentioned it," she said.

That was Peter Thomson. For him, playing golf was a simple thing and largely irrelevant in the scheme of life. It meant nothing when compared to fighting in wars or saving lives on the operating table.

Macdonald told of another story when, while living in Boston, Thomson rang him to say that Jack Nicklaus had chosen him to be honoured at his Muirfield tournament in Ohio.

"Would you speak, as I need to get someone who will make me appear better than I was," Thomson requested of his friend.

I spent some time with Thomson in 2005 when Ross Perrett asked me to write a book about the working history of their golf course design company Thomson, Wolveridge, Perrett.

Every day, Peter would come into the Melbourne office and sit in the foyer at a table, his laptop on his knee, typing away at something.



*The statue of Peter Thomson at his beloved Victoria Golf Club was adorned with the Claret Jug and the Stonehaven Cup on the morning of his funeral. Photo by Justin Falconer*

One day I asked him if he'd ever write a book because he never had. The only one written about him, by Channel 7 newsreader Peter Mitchell, had been done without Peter's assistance, other than, I believe, to agree to a final read to confirm facts.

Peter had read it and approved, but he didn't contribute.

"I'll write one soon," he declared, but in a manner that suggested he probably never would.

At the time, Peter was 75 and, knowing that he'd never started a book, I doubted that he'd ever finish one. I didn't like the idea that one of the great observers and commentators of golf might one day die without ever having his thoughts collated in some worthy form, other than in the dusty files of newspaper libraries where he'd once written columns.

I put a proposal to him. I'll ask you questions, you talk into my tape recorder and I'll transcribe it verbatim. For reasons I never discovered, he agreed.

Two or three times a week, we'd sit down for 30 minutes or so and I'd ask him things like playing in the wind, the key to winning, golf in Scotland, his favourite holes, tips for beginners, and insights into the great players he competed with and against.

And I took him into The Age, then in Spencer St, where we went through old columns he'd written over 40 years, including one he'd penned and filed immediately after one of his Open wins and before attending his own press conference.

The timeless columns we incorporated into the book, along with photos from his massive scrapbook started by his first wife Lois and lovingly maintained by his second wife Mary.

The result was a golfing book encapsulating only his thoughts on golf. It didn't address his passion and knowledge for so many other aspects of his life, such as painting, reading, cricket, his beloved Carlton Football Club, his charity work or why he once ran for parliament.

For there were so many parts to Peter Thomson, and golf was just one.

While compiling the book, I remember two days in particular – the first and the last.

My first question was something like: "What's the essence of good golf?" He replied: "Pick your target and hit the ball there."

I waited for some elaboration, like keep a calm disposition, don't throttle the club,



*The relaxed and wonderful swing of Peter Thomson.*

*Photography:  
Courtesy Golf Australia*

swing within yourself, study the terrain, trust yourself, but nothing came.

I realised then that, for this man, the game was that simple. Maybe that's why his normal preparation for a round was tackling The Times crossword rather than the practice fairway.

The other day I recall was the last. It was a Monday, Peter was flat and I asked him why.

"I only needed to par the last at Sorrento yesterday and I would have bettered my age, but I bogeyed it for a 75."

The two surprises here were that he still cared so much and, second, that he'd never broken his age, something many people not half as good at the game have done, and some more than once.

He later told me that he reckoned he never did it because he only ever played good, tough courses – Victoria, Royal Melbourne, Sorrento, Portsea, Moonah Links, The National, and The Old Course at St Andrews, and presumably from back tees, wearing shoes, not spikes, and carrying his small bag with less than the allowed 14 clubs.

Whether the "tough courses" theory was true or whether there was another reason, such as his firmly held belief that "it's only ever a game", I'll never know.

Along with Macdonald, another guest speaker at the Thomson memorial, held at the MCG and before about 1000 people, was Martin Slumbers, the Chief Executive of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.

He flew to Melbourne bringing with him, presumably on his lap and not in the luggage compartment, the Claret Jug, which Peter won five times.

It was a gesture the family greatly appreciated and one that Peter himself would not have requested nor expected, for he was self-effacing when it came to titles and honours.

"As many would know, Dad played 30 Opens in his lifetime," Thomson's son Andrew told the memorial service. 'I lost 25 times.' That's the way he'd put it."

Indeed, if you ever mentioned to him his greatness as a player, Peter would always defer to modesty. Always.

He'd point out that two or three of his Open wins were against fields where only a handful of players were good enough and hardened enough to win. That as a touring professional, he had an enormous advantage when compared to those who were simply club pros stepping out of their pro shops for a morning round.

*"As many would know, Dad played 30 Opens in his lifetime," Thomson's son Andrew told the memorial service. 'I lost 25 times.' That's the way he'd put it."*

In Tony Walker's book *The Peter Thomson Five*, Thomson also states that he got lucky and that several times he was the beneficiary of favourable weather, while others were subjected to wind and rain.

These are views dismissed by almost everybody who saw him play. Norman Von Nida, a massive influence on Thomson's career, never doubted Thomson was our greatest ever male player and that his five Opens and nearly 100 victories worldwide surpassed Greg Norman's two Opens and 331 weeks as world number one.

An often-overlooked fact about Thomson's record in Opens are his collective finishes. After his first Open outing in 1951 when he finished sixth, Thomson finished 2-2-1-1-1-2-1-23-9-7-6-5-24-1 in the next 14 years.

And he did play in America before his senior years, even though many say he didn't. Despite disliking the target golf of American courses and, one suspects, the overly exuberant galleries, Thomson did finish fifth in the 1957 Masters and fourth in the 1956 US Open.

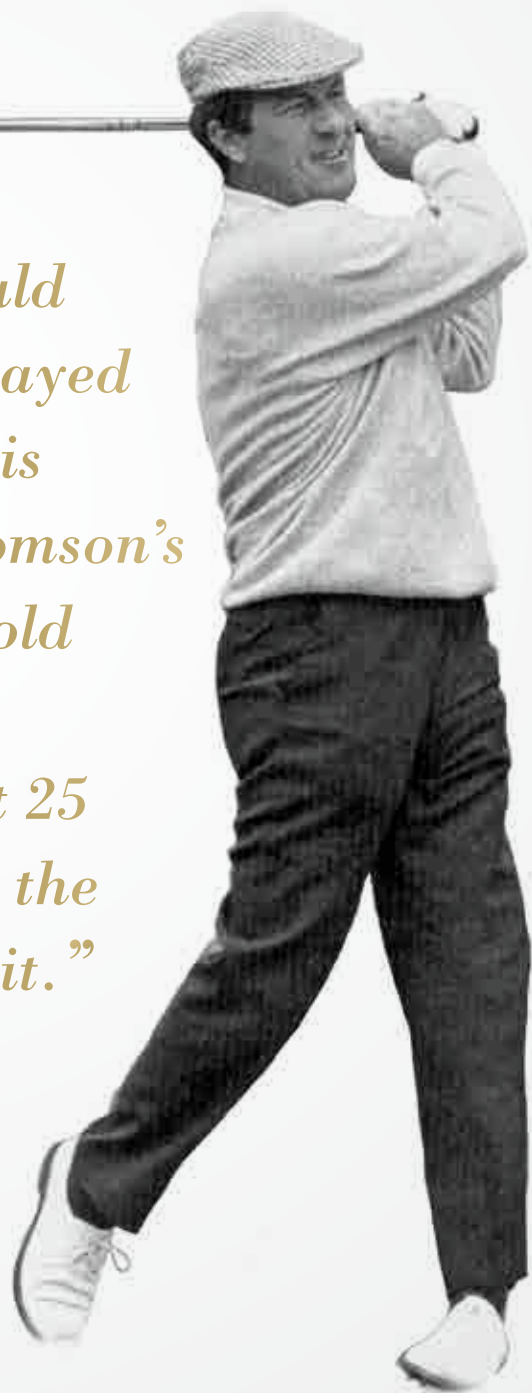
All told, he actually played in eight Masters and five US Opens and made the cut, in all, nine times out of 13 starts. He also

won the 1956 Texas Open in a playoff from Gene Littler and Cary Middlecoff, two pretty handy American players and winners of, between them, three majors in the States.

Peter himself, when asked where he thought he stood, would simply say that Karrie Webb, with seven LPGA major titles and 41 career wins, was, is, our best golfer.

Perhaps one of his close friends – someone who might not appreciate having this thought attributed to him – had the ideal answer. "The perfect golfer would be a blend – Greg Norman playing the first 14 holes and Thomson the closing four.

"Norman was exciting, daring, but if you needed to come home in par, par, birdie, par, Peter Thomson is the one you'd choose to get it done."







# Thommo, Francesco & The Brown Hues Of British Golf

**MIKE CLAYTON** reflects on the contribution of Peter Thomson to Australian and world golf, Francesco Molinari's win at Carnoustie and the reasons why the Open Championship is the world's pre-eminent tournament.



*The difficult, burned-off links of Carnoustie asked many questions and Francesco Molinari had all the answers.*



Peter Thomson was an essential part of Australian golf and likely we will never see another to have such an influence on shaping the local game.

Greg Norman was of significant influence in his own way but, unlike Thomson, he has rarely written on the issues critical to the future of golf and he doesn't live here. Thomson did both and was always the conscience, the voice of influence willing to take the unpopular view and give it expression.

He railed against the payment of appearance fees, describing them as demeaning and doing nothing to distinguish our national Open from those of Brazil or Morocco. Of course, it was an exaggeration for effect but the principle was exactly right.

Fees for appearance were, however, necessary if we expected to see the game's biggest stars, and the regular visits by Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player boosted our big events by giving them international legitimacy and bringing out bigger crowds.

Thomson and Kel Nagle also brought them prestige, but never did they have their hands out and it must have been with dismay that they first saw our own players – or, more accurately, their managers – demanding fees for appearance. If it wasn't for Thomson and Nagle there may not have even been a tour for them to play at all.

I well understand the reality but it's the amounts now that stagger. Tiger Woods set the high-mark when he was reportedly paid \$3million to play at Kingston Heath in the 2009 Masters. It was a hugely successful tournament (one, given the aftermath, we can assume he wishes he'd never have heard of, let alone played) but you could almost see the cogs of the agents' brains ticking: 'If Tiger is worth three, then Phil is worth two and if he's worth two, Ernie is worth 1.5', and so on down the line until players unlikely to sell more than a handful of tickets think they are worth mid-six figure sums.

It's madness but it's the reality and one Thomson was warning about decades ago.

The Australian Open is still the best title in the country but as of February next year, it may no longer be the best tournament. The Vic Open will challenge it and will have attained that position, not through the payment of fees but through the creation of a great event, one where the event itself is bigger than the players.

At Kingston Heath, Woods was much bigger than the Masters itself and within a few years the tournament had completely lost its energy – an energy so brilliantly created in the 1980s by its owners David Inglis and Frank Williams.

All Tiger and his fee had done was paper over the cracks for a year or two.

At the Australian Open the talk is always about who is going to play and if a couple of highly paid superstars grace us with their presence, everything is right with the world.

Maybe it is but it disguises a malaise and a view that a couple of players are bigger and more important than the championship itself. It's a recipe perhaps for short-term success but is it sustainable in the long term?

What it needs is for the best Australian players – all of them – to turn up every single year and play. Maybe they need a fee, but a reasonable one because at this point none has a career close to matching Thomson's.

Another issue Thomson fought hard and eventually lost was the size of the ball debate. He was a fan of the 1.62-inch British 'small ball' but in the late 1970s players considering a professional career had no choice but to adopt the 1.68-inch ball because it was clear it would be the universal ball of the professional game.

Unquestionably, playing the big ball made the famous generation led by Norman, Nick Faldo, Severiano Ballesteros, Bernhard Langer, Nick Price and Sandy Lyle and gave them the ability to play against the best players from the United States.

Thomson was wrong in one sense but right in another. "Why," he asked, "are we acquiescing to the forces in America?"

It was but another example of Thomson being the world voice of golf because no one else was going to articulate the point. You can assume the Americans never even considered they fall in line with the entirety of the rest of the world and play the smaller ball.

The bigger ball was introduced first at The Open in 1974 and within five years Ballesteros had won his first, and the generation of great European players was on its way to transforming the professional game outside of the United States.

Almost 40 years on from Ballesteros, we watched the first Italian winner at Carnoustie, the difficult, and this year burned-off, links on the east coast of Scotland. Few picked

Francesco Molinari but they missed the obvious: that no one had played better golf over the preceding few months.

For those who haven't seen Molinari play, imagine Peter O'Malley but with a better putter and more power, brought on in no small way by the modern ball and driver. Molinari, like O'Malley, was known as an average putter but those who hit like machines often are, in part because they don't have to putt as well as those less accurate.

Thomson was a bit the same but he always stressed the importance of 'holing-out' well and Molinari certainly holed out with great efficiency.

The other champion was the golf course itself. There were so many ways to play each hole, and confusing questions are at the heart of so many of the game's great holes.

*Fair and consistent it was not, and anything breaking down the stereotype that golf needs to be fair and consistent is a good thing.*

The rough was ideal – unpredictable, playable, yet random enough to make the shots out a guess as to how the ball was going to react. Fair and consistent it was not, and anything breaking down the stereotype that golf needs to be fair and consistent is a good thing.

The other obvious thing was the colour of the course and whilst some will never see it, such is their reverence for green, the brown hues of British golf this summer is a reminder that the weather should dictate how the golf course looks and plays. It's something the R&A understand and never do they try and force a winning score out of a golf course. "It is," said Jack Nicklaus, "the conditions which determine the par."

After the bad-tempered controversy at Shinnecock Hills in June, it's perhaps a philosophy of which the USGA would do well to take some note. They won't, because it's not their way, but The Open remains the game's world championship.

Its pre-eminent position is in no small way due to the contribution Peter Thomson made at an austere time in the 1950s when it needed great players just as much as they needed it.

# ZAC SAYS GOLF IS AWESOME

**Nine-year-old Zac Herft is a perfect example of golf's capacity for inclusion. And with a state government subsidy, the MyGolf All Abilities program is set to help more people like Zac fall in love with the game. JANELLE WARD explains.**

Why do you play golf?

Are you like "Phil" who has played for decades, and lives for the challenge in every round and the opportunity to get his handicap down? Maybe you're more like "Ros", who is less driven but enjoys being outdoors, loves the walk and the possibility she will hit some good shots.

Or maybe you're lucky enough to be like Zac, who says, simply, he loves golf because it's an "awesome" sport.

In fact, he says: "It's an awesome, awesome, awesome sport."

Zac Herft is nine. He had one lesson and when dad Graeme asked him if wanted to go back next week, Zac said: "No, tomorrow."

Zac has autism. The condition will throw up challenges throughout his life. But at golf clinics and on course – he played nine holes last school holidays but dietary issues currently limit his stamina – he is one of the kids, in fact better than most of the kids. He gets it, and golf – perhaps *the* most inclusive game for its capacity to involve people of all abilities – is especially great for kids like Zac.

And great becomes perfect when you have parents like Graeme and Rachel and a coach like Ranfurlie Golf Club's PGA teaching professional Ben Bunny.

Zac followed his "fanatical golfer" dad into golf, says Rachel as Zac proudly shows off his bag of clubs and his swing – holding one, two, three, at the end as instructed, while answering questions about his favourite clubs, what footy team he supports and why he loves golf. "I love my driver, my rescue and my putter. Next week, we're doing the seven-iron and a pitching wedge. I love hitting the ball long. I barrack for the Hawks."

Zac was born sporty, swinging a plastic club as soon as he could stand up. "He has very good hand-eye coordination," Rachel says. "He tried footy, and still does kick-to-kick, but he doesn't like to be touched; he played some cricket and still plays tennis. He does swim lessons – that's non-negotiable – but he just loves golf."

So is golf a particularly good fit for children and adults on the autism spectrum? You get an emphatic yes from Graeme and Rachel.



"Once Zac gets fixated on something, he will absorb everything he can about it and go over and over and over again," says Rachel. "He loves practising. And with golf, he has his own space. It doesn't overload his senses."

Graeme adds: "Once he learns the proper set-up – the swing, everything to do with it – it won't change. It will be there for life."

Both Graeme and Rachel say Zac's "life skills" – his concentration and his ability to focus and take instruction – have really lifted as a result of the lessons.

"I noticed a massive change once he started lessons," says Rachel. "Even after one term – his enthusiasm, his physical ability, coordination, everything. It was amazing."

Graeme adds: "It's very mentally stimulating, especially on the putting green. You can see him thinking about which way the ball will go."

While Graeme and Rachel say Ben is brilliant, Ben is quick to shift the praise on to them.

"Graeme has been absolutely wonderful," says Ben. "He gets all the credit. Before the first session with Zac, I told Graeme he needed to be there the whole time and whatever I said, he needed to relay to Zac. That requirement lasted a very short time, but his support has been enormous."

There are two boys with autism in Ben's six-person classes, and they've stuck fast. Hayden, 13, has been attending for about three years and Zac for about 15 months.

Ben says PGA workshops guide professionals and officials on how to teach people of all abilities, although none focus specifically on autism. He says he has developed his skills through experience – coaching children for more than 10 years.

"It's about understanding how kids with autism function, how they learn," he says. "It's important to know how to handle situations, liaise with parents, give the kids focus."

## **GOLF - PERHAPS THE MOST INCLUSIVE GAME FOR ITS CAPACITY TO INVOLVE PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES - IS ESPECIALLY GREAT FOR KIDS LIKE ZAC.**

"In the 30-minute sessions, we're always doing something. We have good routines, which particularly suits kids with autism. We put them through A-B-C. Then once they are ready, it's A-B-C-D and so on. Kids on the spectrum are very smart – to the point where they think they are always right. You've just got to go along with it."

"I'm not too concerned about how they go in terms of their golf so long as they are having fun. If they hit two decent shots in a session, that's fine, but Zac hits 50 good shots. He's awesome. And he just kept getting better and better."

Given that we know Zac's level of satisfaction with the game – "an awesome, awesome, awesome, sport" – what is Ben's view of his role?

"Love it. Absolutely *love* it. It's a sport we can include everyone in," he says, the conviction in his voice emphatic. "And "everyone" for

Ben goes beyond kids with autism to youngsters with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and the vision-impaired. He is a coach for all-comers.

"It doesn't matter what their ability, we can take them through their paces and get them where they want to go. More importantly, get them to understand they can play this game."

"It is a game for all abilities. In a class and on a course, they're not competing against anyone else, they're there to have fun and learn and improve themselves."

"For me, it's understanding what we can control for the likes of Zac – right grip, stance, follow through for three seconds. It's unbelievable to watch. Once these kids get it, it's incredible."

"We (PGA pros) have the opportunity to be leaders and foster golfers of all abilities. It's as simple as that."

It's obvious that Ben loves what he does and takes pride in the results he is achieving. The confirmation is in seeing the progress kids such as Zac are making.

"He's found something he can do. He's attentive when he's here, focussed. You can see that it matters."

As Zac continues to practise in the living room, so motivated, and proud of his obvious skills, you absolutely know golf matters, that he has a sport and a passion for life.

## **THE GAME FOR ALL ABILITIES**

"The great thing about our sport is that everyone can participate together," says Golf Australia National Inclusion Manager Christian Hamilton as he talks enthusiastically about golf's unique capacity to include players with intellectual and physical disabilities in mainstream play.

The 'together' aspect is being accelerated through the MyGolf All Abilities program.

MyGolf is a 10-week introductory program for five to 12-year-olds. MyGolf All Abilities, Hamilton explains, is a similar introductory program but for kids of all abilities, "for kids who may not feel supported or comfortable, at least initially, in mainstream programs".

And the good news for parents and children thinking about joining an All Abilities program in Victoria is that the state government has just provided an extra \$20,000 to subsidise some of the costs of crossing from school clinics to club-based programs.

"This specific funding from the Victorian State Government makes it easier for kids to transition from school-based programs to club programs run by a PGA All Abilities Coach," Hamilton says.

All Abilities sessions are delivered by accredited PGA coaches who have undergone additional training to support kids with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.

Participants in All Abilities programs receive a MyGolf giveaway pack that includes a golf club and a Special Olympics membership.

**Go to MyGolf All Abilities at**  
[www.mygolf.org.au/mygolf-all-abilities](http://www.mygolf.org.au/mygolf-all-abilities)  
 and enter your postcode to find the centre closest to you.



# LEARNING FROM



*Karrie Webb and fellow Aussie pros Sarah-Jane Smith and Hannah Green made the KPMG Women's PGA Championship the trip of a lifetime for Grace Kim (left) and Rebecca Kay (right). Photo courtesy: Karrie Webb*

**Continuing her regular column, Golf Australia's National Female Pathway Manager STACEY PETERS reports on a busy overseas learning curve for our best young players and the positive impact of being up close and personal with the stars of the game.**

The Karrie Webb Series, a year-long competition accruing points from national ranking events, carries the most valuable reward in Australian amateur golf.

This year's winners, Gold Coast's Rebecca Kay and Sydney's Grace Kim, earned a trip to the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Kemper Lakes Golf Club in Chicago at the end of June to spend the week with

Karrie. Not only did they get to shadow her at the course, they shared a house with her and fellow LPGA Tour player Sarah-Jane Smith.

As part of my role at Golf Australia – and being the golf nerd that I am – I was keen to chaperone the girls for the week. It truly is an extraordinary prize – one I was lucky enough to win in 2009, when I got to spend a week with Karrie at the US Women's Open, learning from the world's best and having inside-the-ropes access to our greatest golfer.

Just as I did, the girls this year took so much away from the week.

Grace was all ears and eyes. "I learned so much on the course with Karrie's preparation, especially with her short game. She practises every possible situation around the greens – she might use one

club, but has three different shots with it," Grace told me afterwards.

Becky was equally awestruck and took note of the differences between the pros' preparation and those of many amateurs.

"I found that Karrie and a lot of top players do so much work on the course to prepare," Becky said.

"They're not worried so much about hitting many balls on the range, but more getting to know the course as best they can."

Most of all, the girls left motivated for their next tournaments so they could put what they had learned into practice.

From Chicago, I headed to Houston for Golf Australia's national camp at Woodlands Country Club.

# THE BEST

This camp has been running for eight years and is essentially a chance for athletes scattered around the world – amateur and professional – to catch up with Australia's best service providers.

Initially set up through a relationship between the late Ramsay McMaster and the host club's professional Kevin Kirk, it was my first time attending the camp.

It just so happens that Kirk is Patrick Reed's coach and the athletes were incredibly lucky to have a "Q&A" session with the current Masters champion. Our athletes were starstruck and sat in awe as he spoke about work ethic, drive and his team.

And just like the girls had with Karrie, the athletes left the room itching to get to the range and motivated to follow in Patrick's footsteps.

Our golfers have performed very well since the camp, which goes to show the importance of regular contact with your golf coach and service team.

These results include Melbourne's Gabi Ruffels finishing runner-up in the North and South Amateur at Pinehurst, Canberra's Adam Thorp winning the 15-18 IMG World Junior at Torrey Pines, and Sydney's Doey Choi finishing second in the individual and, with her state teammate Steph Kyriacou, winning the girls' team event by six at Torrey Pines.

Doey carried her form over to the US Junior Girls at Poppy Hills, making it to the quarter finals, getting knocked out by number one seed Lucy Li. Other Australians who qualified for the event were Western Australian Maddison Hinson-Tolchard, who made the round of 64, and Steph Kyriacou, who made it through to the round of 16.

The biennial World Amateur Teams Championships are to be held in Ireland for the first time at Carton House, near Dublin. This is the pinnacle of amateur golf and I will be managing both the women's team - comprising Becky, Grace and Queenslander Kirsty Hodgkins – and the men's team of Dave Micheluzzi, Perth's Min Woo Lee and the Sunshine Coast's Shae Wools-Cobb. The men have a lot to live up to, being the

defending champions, but I think they will do well again.

I will be travelling with women's team coach Dean Kinney from NSW and men's coach Grant Field from Queensland, in what will be an ideal opportunity to gauge our best against the rest of the world.

The girls will compete for the Espirito Santo trophy between August 29 and September 1 and the guys for the Eisenhower Trophy from September 5-9.

I've also had some exciting things happening within my role. Along with Megan Carr, GV Regional Development Officer (North Eastern, Goulburn Murray, Dalhousie), I received a Change Our Game scholarship, which provides funding to assist women to access professional learning and development opportunities in sport and recreation leadership. I plan to use this to do a presentation/speaking course to help me communicate and present messages to female athletes.

Since starting my role as Female National Pathway Manager, a big aim of mine has been to set up female-only focus groups in each state. It was therefore very exciting to see the first one take place in South Australia – and to see how well the day went.

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At the Adelaide session, cyclist and Olympian Kaarle McCulloch addressed the golfers about her own trials and tribulations.

This is something I will try to encourage at each session, as it was great to have a perspective from an athlete in another individual sport. To hear her story was really motivating for the group.

The aim of these days is to get the girls practising together, creating a more competitive environment to prepare for the world of professional golf. We were looking at course management, yardage book usage and talking about the areas we struggle in because we are girls that play golf.

These sessions also align with Golf Australia's Vision 2025, which, in part, aims to increase the participation of female golfers.



*Gabi Ruffels has had some great results in the US. Photo: Paul Shire*

# NICOLETTE

## A GAME-CHANGER

**A broken leg led Nicolette Proctor to hop from tennis to golf, with her competitive instincts helping her from beginner to Division One pennant player within 18 months. She talks to BRUCE MATTHEWS about her new passion.**

Imagine being thrust into head-to-head combat in Golf Victoria's Division One Metropolitan Women's Pennant competition, barely 18 months after taking up the sport and with just one previous round of matchplay experience.

That's just part of the remarkable sporting remake of Nicolette Proctor, an elite young tennis player forced to find an alternative sport after a succession of crippling injuries.

Golf has found its way under Proctor's skin, as for so many other athletes from other sports who find it might not be their original sporting passion but it's the one to satisfy their competitive urges for many years after.

Proctor was a protege of renowned coach Peter Murphy at Dingley Tennis Club and later former tour player Craig Miller. Despite being a late starter who didn't play her first tennis tournament until 16, she advanced to become club champion at Dendy Park and Grace Park.

Rather than follow players such as Jarmila Gajdosova, Olivia Rogowska and Sally Peers onto the women's international tour, Proctor opted for bases in Paris and near Stuttgart, playing club competition and smaller money tournaments in Europe.

"I had the option of going for a world ranking or doing club tennis. I had a friend who went the world ranking option but I didn't want to live out of a suitcase, play a match and get on a plane. Wherever I went, I tried to become a local and also did all the tourist sites," she said.

A tall player armed with a powerful serve and one-handed backhand, her career



*Nicolette Proctor's switch from tennis to golf has reignited her competitive spirit.*

was stalled by injuries that included four operations to repair knee and ankle tendons.

"The majority were tennis-related from the court, but the last one I broke my leg. I was running and they think I had a stress fracture, but I kept going and the leg completely snapped. That brought a halt to the tennis."

While she was convalescing at the family home in Dingley and considering her options, her parents provided the perfect opportunity to get her up and about again. A new sporting focus was fuelled by membership to nearby Southern Golf Club.

"Because of the broken leg, I couldn't do much and I was moping around the house. I was probably annoying my Mum, ringing my bell, because I'm quite a competitive person and it was frustrating. When I was able to walk, Mum and Dad bought me a membership at Southern," she said.

"I had never thought of playing golf. I looked at it as a pretty basic game, hit that little ball, play the same course all the time. Boring. But I was very wrong; it's the most challenging sport I've ever played. No-one ever masters it, even the world number one and I just don't get that.

"In tennis, if things weren't working your way, you could change the tactics, serve-volley or slice it to their backhand. But with golf, you've got that ball that doesn't respond. It's not a reactive sport."

Proctor became hooked on golf and she's indebted to the coaches at Melbourne Golf Academy for the beginners lessons that complemented her single-minded urge to get better at this strangely addictive new sporting venture.

"I would sneak out really early in the morning before anyone else. I didn't think I could play with anyone, that I would slow them down," she said.

"One day, a group of ladies cornered me. They said, 'We always see you here and we're putting you down on the timesheet.' I thought, 'Oh, no. How do I get out of this?' But it was best thing that could've happened and I haven't stopped playing since."

From a starting club handicap of 35, she was down to single figures in 12 months and the rapid progression earned selection in Southern's pennant team for this year's Division One competition against powerful sandbelt clubs including eventual champion Commonwealth, finalist Huntingdale, Kingston Heath, Metropolitan and Victoria.

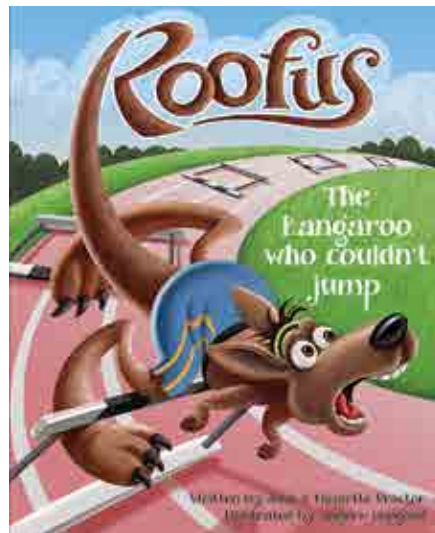
"That was quite daunting. I had only ever played one matchplay round. Turning up

to play, it was like I was among a bunch of professionals. It was intimidating. I would get a bucket of balls to warm up and I didn't want to hit them because everyone else was swinging so smoothly," she said.

"I would be thinking 'please don't make a fool of myself, just swing it nicely'. They're all working on shaping the ball and I'm thinking 'get the ball in the air', which is not a good mindset."

Southern assigned experienced member Sandy Gould to caddie for the rookie number seven who played every round and broke through with a one-up win at Victoria Golf Club in round three.

"Getting the opportunity to play all the different courses was really good. I only won one match, but the experience of competition was invaluable," she said.



*Nicolette hopes Roofus can inspire kids to get off the couch and into exercise.*

"My caddie Sandy has been a massive influence and has helped me so much. She's a great friend and we play a lot together. We're kind of known as the insane couple because we do 18 holes in the morning, have lunch and then do another 18 in the afternoon."

Like so many converts from other sports, Proctor was inspired by golf's etiquette and the embracing nature of friends and foes despite the run of frustrating defeats, even once playing number one amid the team tactics of pennant competition.

"I noticed that straight away. Tennis is very single-minded. With golf, sure, you want to win your match but you can appreciate good shots. You sort of want your opponents to do well, but you obviously

want to win too. Golfers tend to help you whereas with tennis, you're more on your own," she said.

Just one win from seven matches was the brutal reality of the newcomer's tough debut pennant season. But it's a statistic more than counter-balanced by the value of fast-forward experience only 18 months after switching from swatting yellow balls to attempting to control the little white one. You can bet Proctor will learn from the losses and be better prepared next time.

That determination to make the sports transition is also clearly evident in her other passion: helping combat childhood obesity.

The 31-year-old is devoted to the project of Roofus, the kangaroo who couldn't jump.

Roofus is the central character in a fantasy story written by her father John, and has attracted interest from Diabetes Australia to help promote awareness of the importance of diet and exercise for kids.

"It's a story of perseverance. Dad would always come up with stories when we were younger. It might be the kookaburra who couldn't laugh and how he got his laugh, or the duck that was afraid of water, things like that. He has a wonderful imagination and I guess he'll always be a big kid at heart," she said.

"We want to do something that might help change the health of kids, particularly as the stats show we're becoming an obese society. Children are our future, so we want to start them from a young age."

Diabetes Australia has indicated the character would be helpful for their marketing campaign and a creature technology company that developed walking dinosaur characters is working on a three-dimensional Roofus that can be adapted as toys and iPad apps.

"There will be different incentives for children to get out and exercise. Cartoon characters resonate with children. The book has been written and illustrations done, but it hasn't been published yet," she said.

In the meantime, she plays golf three days a week and heads to the practice range on another couple of days.

"Golf is very addictive and the work with this project fits in well with my golf," she said.

That couch in the family home hasn't seen much of Proctor of late.

*Laid back ... Adam Tsiamis is relaxed about his development.*



# ADAM MAPS A DIFFERENT ROUTE

**THE WAYS TO A PROFESSIONAL GOLF CAREER ARE MANY. CHARLES HAPPELL SPEAKS TO METROPOLITAN'S ADAM TSIAMIS, WHO IS TRYING A DIFFERENT ROUTE, MIXING THE MODERN SCIENTIFIC APPROACH WITH SOME OLD-FASHIONED VARIETY AND PATIENCE.**

In navigating a route through the elite ranks of amateur golf, and one day (hopefully) on to the professional scene, Adam Tsiamis has taken the road less travelled.

The Division One pennant player from Metropolitan GC, who is a plus-three marker, has set his sights on making a career out of the game but has mapped out an unconventional path to get there.

Rather than apply for a Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) scholarship and travel down

that high performance pathway, or study to become a PGA trainee, Tsiamis chose to fine tune his game at that less well-known breeding ground for elite talent, the Maribyrnong Sports Academy.

The Academy is part of Maribyrnong Secondary College and it was there, from Year Eight to Year 12, that he practised three times a week, before school at 6.30am and then after classes at Medway GC, under the expert eye of coaches Robyn Sottile and Mark Holland.



Adam Tsiamis at Metropolitan.

Under the MSA program, Tsiamis was also taught about strength and conditioning in the gym, nutrition and diet, 3D biomechanics analysis and the benefits of Trackman – basically a well-rounded, holistic preparation for life as a professional golfer.

"I think absolutely the academy provided me with everything I needed," he said. "The program there was almost like being on an elite pathway at the VIS, so I don't feel as though I lost much by attending Maribyrnong."

Having done sufficiently well in his Year 12 studies in 2015, Tsiamis did not plunge headlong into his golf career but embarked on an economics and finance course at RMIT instead, a degree he hopes to finish at the end of this year.

"I'm only 21, there's no hurry. I think most players don't really make it until they're 24 or 25 at the earliest, unless they're a freak, so I figure I've got plenty of time."

"Mum and Dad have been very supportive and haven't pushed in one direction or another but they did say it might not be a bad idea to get a degree out of the way first, then I've always got that to fall back on.

"So, I suppose the path I've chosen is a bit unconventional but I'm happy to have done it this way."

His current coach, Andrew Pitt at Yarra Bend, is certainly a supporter of the Maribyrnong setup, saying the academy seemed to be producing a lot of well-prepared youngsters.

"They seem to do a great job at teaching the fundamentals and giving players a strong grounding in the game," Pitt said.

"Every one of the Maribyrnong players we've had here (at Yarra Bend) has been good to teach. So, I think Robyn and the coaches out there have clearly got a development program that works."

In assessing Tsiamis' decision to attend the Maribyrnong academy and then go to uni, Pitt said it was "a bit old-fashioned" the way he had eased into his career.

"Golf is not like AFL where the best young players come out of the one system at the same age," Pitt said. "In golf, you can come from anywhere and be 28 or 30, and still make a go of it.

"People realise now that the Tiger Woods' and Jason Days of this world are very unusual. Most young players aren't ready to play tournaments at 18 – they need time to mature and maybe get their studies done and then think about devoting their time to a golf career.

"So, you could say Adam's done it the smart way."

Tsiamis played lots of different sports at primary school but his mum suggested trying golf just as he was about to enter secondary school and he quickly got the bug. He began playing at Riverside and Medway and soon got his handicap down to single figures.

He then joined Metro four years ago and became a scholarship holder in 2017.

**"I'M ONLY 21, THERE'S NO HURRY. I THINK MOST PLAYERS DON'T REALLY MAKE IT UNTIL THEY'RE 24 OR 25 AT THE EARLIEST, UNLESS THEY'RE A FREAK, SO I FIGURE I'VE GOT PLENTY OF TIME."**

Even though Tsiamis' handicap is now plus-three, such is the strength and depth of Metro's Division One team that he plays at number six – behind the likes of David Micheluzzi, Lukas Michel and Blake Collyer.

Metro, of course, won Golf Victoria's Division One pennant final in May, pipping Kingston Heath 4-3 at Cranbourne, but Tsiamis was nowhere to be seen.

He had decided back in February to apply for the Universities' Championship in the Philippines, not realising that the tournament would clash in May with Metro's appearance in the pennant final.



So, while his teammates were celebrating their second flag in three years, Tsiamis was at Lubao in the Filipino province of Pampanga, playing a 72-hole strokeplay event against some of the best student golfers from around the world. He finished a creditable 13th and said the experience was invaluable.

"You just don't know how the year's going to pan out, so it was a disappointment not to play in the pennant final, yes, but I still had a great experience in the Philippines and got a lot out of that tournament," he said.

Certainly, Pitt said, that kind of international exposure and competition is what will drive Tsiamis' game forward more quickly than any sessions on the practice range in Melbourne.

"He's got a good all-round game and is a hard worker, but what he needs now to take his game to the next level is more travelling overseas and playing top international amateur events," Pitt said. "Once he gets that exposure, I think he'll become really match-hardened and find a way to get his three- and four-under scores down to six- and seven-under."

And that's exactly what Tsiamis plans to do in 2019, assuming he gets the marks to graduate from RMIT later this year.

"Next year, I want to play a full calendar of events, and that includes some tournaments in the UK and Europe," he said. "I really want to play good courses and test myself against the best young amateurs out there. Just prepare myself the best I can before, hopefully, turning pro."

# MIKE OPEN

**Mike Sheahan's name is synonymous with football as a veteran reporter and broadcaster but he also has a passion for golf. MARTIN BLAKE interviewed the interviewer and discovered it's the game that, literally, took his breath away.**

Mike Sheahan loves his golf so much that it led to a major change in his life. Fortunately, it has worked out for the better.

The footy writer and broadcaster – arguably the best we've seen in his field – has had a regular Saturday morning game with a group of mates, including former Carlton forward Mark Maclure, for many years at Portsea Golf Club, where he is a long-time member.

First introduced to Portsea's magnificent rolling fairways 20 years ago by another journalistic colleague, the late Trevor Grant, Sheahan last year found himself puffing and panting his way up the hills. "I was tired just walking around there, not in pain, but just short of breath," he said. He would not get a cart to help him despite Portsea's undulation, because it's not the way he plays. "Golf, to me, is an excuse to have a good walk," he said.

Sheahan took medical advice and learned that he needed open-heart surgery, which was duly performed in November. A triple bypass along with a new aortic valve later, he is back playing golf. But only just!

He needed his doctor's approval to get out on the course because he had also endured a double hernia operation. Otherwise seriously fit for his 71 years, Sheahan said he had put on weight with his recent inactivity and he wanted to put it right. He's also back playing tennis, another great love.

Sheahan's first contact with golf was in his youth at Werribee, where the original

town golf course was wedged in the middle of the race track (since moved to the outskirts and reinvented as Werribee Park). As it happened, the original course was straight across the road from his primary school, St Andrew's, and he dabbled in the game left-handed amongst his usual staples of footy in winter (he ended up playing to VFA level for Werribee) and tennis in summer.

When he joined The Age in the 1970s after stints as a reporter with the Werribee Banner, the defunct Newsday, the Hobart Mercury and Inside Football, then-chief footy and cricket writer Percy Beames introduced him to Riversdale Golf Club, where he began taking golf seriously. He played well enough to get his handicap down to a career-low 15, although he has slipped out to 19 now. The game, he says, frustrates him.

"I was never good enough to play to 15," he said when asked to describe his game. "Scrappy, I suppose. I get frustrated. For someone who's watched as much sport as I have and who's reasonably athletic, I should be better."

***"I was never good enough to play to 15 ... for someone who's watched as much sport as I have and who's reasonably athletic, I should be better."***

He enjoys the professional game and went on a trip to the Masters at Augusta National with some friends in 2014, seeing Bubba Watson win. One afternoon on the emerald green fairways, he followed Adam Scott and Jason Day and came to a big realisation. "When you look at that, it's not the same game, they don't play the game we play," he said. "I'd have 150 going around Augusta!"

On the day that we played at Albert Park, he nabbed me at the last of nine holes, although I might have protested at having to give him six shots. Sheahan kept the ball in play off the tee and only complained of one major flaw: a dodgy chipping technique.

A competitor to the end, he is, which you need to be in old-school journalism.

Younger people watching him host Open Mike on Fox Footy might not realise that Sheahan spent 40 years as a newspaper man, mainly with the big mastheads: The Age, then The Herald, the Sunday Age and finally the Herald Sun. He walked away seven years ago with no regrets.

"I'd just had enough," he said. "You can't get a bigger focus in our sport, and it doesn't stop; it's 24-7. I don't miss it. I reckon I've had two occasions where I've thought: 'I wish I had a column'. But the thing that made me, whatever I was, was hard work. It's not about sitting down writing a brilliant piece. I worked hard. You have to keep getting out and being around." Sheahan did not have that in him anymore but his departure from the Herald Sun was far from a retirement.

Sheahan retains a great love and passion for journalism and for football, which he directs into his regular spot on radio SEN as well as his recent election to the AFL's high-powered 'look of the game' committee, set up after much debate about congestion in the modern game.

But most of all these days, his energy is spent on his award-winning interview show on Fox Footy, Open Mike, a magazine program that has received critical acclaim since its inception in 2009. It was a program he suggested to the network because he believed there were so many people in football whose stories needed to be told, long-form, and it has been hugely successful.

Sheahan proved to be the perfect host with his skilled interviewing technique, his ability to disarm the subjects and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the topic. Of course, many of the people he has interviewed on the program are well known to him, but he does not eschew the hard question.

When he talks to students (he does occasional lectures to journalism students at RMIT, Monash University and Swinburne Institute of Technology),

# ENS UP

*Mike Sheahan is a journalism legend ... and golf tragic.*



he has a particular way of describing his style. "I say to the students, 'I'm a bit like the honey-tipped arrow'. That's a good metaphor for how I do it."

Of course, there is more to it than that. Sheahan says it is better to go hard than dilly-dally. "The other critical element is to get in and get out," he said. "Don't half-ask the question, then make a statement, then come back to it. The people that we're pitching to want to hear from the subject. My view is, get in, ask the question and let them talk."

Like many journalists, he decries the common practice of networks placing former athletes – often ill-trained for the job – into interviewing roles only to fall short at big moments. "They (the former athletes) apologise for them. We're not here to be apologists. We shouldn't be, should we?"

He also tells journalism students that they should focus on getting things right, a skill lost on a lot of modern journalistic outlets in the race to break the news online. "I tell them that, I tell them to engage people, just engage people, and you can't burn them, because you've got to go back to them. It's a judgment call. I say to the kids, and it's a cliché, but it's true: 'If in doubt, leave it out'. But having said that, I didn't always live like that. I took some risks."

***"I would've had the number of every coach and the top 50 players in terms of profile. You just rang them up!"***

Sheahan was a groundbreaker in sports journalism in the sense that, way back in the 1980s, he realised that a newspaper man needed to take in other platforms for his work. At Tim Lane's invitation, he joined the ABC radio team as a regular in a time when the print people stuck to the written word. In 1995, he became a panellist on Channel Seven's Talking Footy and then moved across to Fox for On the Couch. "It was a serious discussion about what we all regard as a serious business," he said of the program. "The feedback from the footy followers was that they wanted a more esoteric discussion about the game, and that's what it was."

Nowadays there is a journo on every footy program but it was Sheahan who started it, in amongst breaking the biggest stories for the Sunday Age and then the Herald Sun. In the modern era, the AFL and its clubs control the message as much as they can and the stories come, as Sheahan says, "in dribs and



*Mike Sheahan was a groundbreaker in journalism, an expert reader of the lie of the land.*

drabs" because there are so many people working in the industry looking for the next big story. But back in the day, it was the likes of Sheahan you had to look to.

"I would've had the number of every coach and the top 50 players in terms of profile," he said. "You just rang them up! The access on matchdays was better as well, because the after-match function was there. You'd go to training and be in the rooms beforehand. I can remember (North Melbourne's) Barry Cable

practising his handballing between the girder and the roof, blokes kicking balls to David Dench, banging them into him from 15 metres. They become more familiar with you."

Sheahan does not know when he will retire. "It mightn't be my choice. But you know what? If it finished today, I wouldn't say I overstayed."

Almost certainly, some more golf will be the result.

# Enter These Golf Vic Events

## THE VICTORIAN BOYS AND GIRLS CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Victorian Boys and Girls Championships form one of three World and Australian Junior Ranking events held in Victoria, alongside the Victorian Junior Masters and the Junior Victorian Open. With the Girls' event first played in 1925 and the Boys' in 1930, the tournament is Victoria's oldest junior event.

Burtt Cheney (1935), Margaret Masters (1951 – 1954), Lindy Goggin (1969), Rachel Hetherington (1991) and Su Oh (2008 and 2010) are some of the fine young female golfers to have held the Girls trophy aloft, while past male champions include Kevin Hartley (1951), Ian Stanley (1966), Bob Shearer (1963), Marc Leishman (2001), Bryden Macpherson (2007) and Todd Sinnott (2009). Last year Bella Kil and Kazuma Kobori joined their ranks.

In 2018 the Championships will be played for the first time at Moonah Links (Open Course) from Monday September 24 to Thursday September 27.

The championships are four rounds of strokeplay. There is no cut but after 36 and 54 holes the draw will be reseeded, with the leading players competing in the afternoon field.

The event has become one of the most coveted titles in the country. The final round is streamed live via Facebook LIVE and the Golf Victoria website.

Entries are now open but close on Monday September 10 at 5pm. Entry fee is \$150.

For more information, please go to: [www.golfvic.org.au/vicboysandgirls](http://www.golfvic.org.au/vicboysandgirls)



*Bella Kil and Kazuma Kobori won the Victorian Boys and Girls titles last year.*

## SIR DALLAS BROOKS TROPHY AND THE VICTORIAN FOURSOMES CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2018 Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy and the Victorian Foursomes Championships will again be held at Metropolitan Golf Club, from Tuesday 30 October to Friday November 2.

The Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy is a mixed foursomes nett competition, unique in that it allows amateurs and professionals to form a team. It consists of one qualifying round of strokeplay on Tuesday before the top 16 compete in knockout matchplay from Wednesday to Friday.

The Victorian Men's, Women's & Mixed Foursomes Championships are also to be played on the Tuesday in conjunction with the qualifying round of the Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy. They are open to amateur pairs only, with eligible mixed pairs able to compete in both the Mixed Foursomes Championship with their gross score and in the Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy with their nett score.

Last year's Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy saw a gripping final, with Spring Valley's Erica Kreymborg and Greg Ebinger prevailing on the 19th hole over Stephanie Wearne of Victoria and Jason Johnson of The National.

Entries open on Monday 13 August and close on Friday 5 October. The winners of the Sir Dallas Brooks Trophy will be offered a start in the Vic Open Tuesday Pro-Am at 13th Beach on Tuesday 5 February 2019.

For more information visit [www.golfvic.org.au/sirdallasbrooks](http://www.golfvic.org.au/sirdallasbrooks)



*Erica Kreymborg and Greg Ebinger joined the Sir Dallas Brooks honour roll last year.*

## VICTORIAN FAMILY CHAMPIONSHIP

A range of family combos will come together again on Sunday 25 November 2018 for the Victorian Family Championship at Barwon Heads Golf Club.

Started in 2004 to create a special event for Victorian golfing families, the championship has been held as 4BBB stableford since 2012. It is open to amateurs and professionals, with men's, women's and mixed competitions. Each two-person team must have an immediate family relationship.

In the 2017 event, Kathryn Robertson and her father Bazil Hammond scored 43 points to take the mixed section, Caroline and Ruth Dickens won the women's, also posting 43 points, and Greg and John Brown had the best score of the day to win the men's with 45 points.

Entries close Wednesday 14 November or earlier if field capacity is reached. The cost is \$130 inc. GST per pair and includes a light lunch for both players. For more information visit [www.golfvic.org.au/family](http://www.golfvic.org.au/family)

# PENNANT LEGEND CALLS TIME

**After almost four decades of playing pennant, James Lavender has called time but tells BRIAN MELDRUM he is already eyeing the senior events.**

He might not be a household name, but among the thousands of really good club golfers that have graced Melbourne's golf courses across the last four decades, you would be hard pressed finding one of them who hasn't at least heard of James Lavender.

A good many of them would have played against him. Not surprising, when you consider he's missed just two years playing pennant for his beloved Northern GC across 38 seasons and in the 1980s and early 1990s was a regular at Ivo Whitton events and state championships.

This year Lavender, 57, helped Northern make it into the Division Three final – they lost to Eynesbury – but had already decided it would be his last season. "I don't know what it was, but something inside me said it was time to call it a day."

He doesn't say so, but when the 2019 pennant season comes around you can bet he'll miss being a part of it, for the simple fact is Lavender loves golf. He loves playing it, he loves watching it, he just loves being a part of it.

He smiles as he recalls how one of his daughters – he and his wife Robyn have twin girls, Nicole and Melissa – once asked him how much he loved golf.

"I don't think I could tell you how much I love golf," was his reply.

His passion is reflected in the fact he's won 22 club championships at Northern and as well as being one of the club's inaugural Hall of Fame inductees, has also been officially designated a Club Legend, something he is humbled by, but naturally very proud of.

"Right from the start I always wanted to join Northern," he said. "It really is a great club; the members are just easy-going, down-to-earth people." Lots of those members like to point out that Lavender is very much of that ilk himself, always up for a chat and invariably putting his name down to play with anyone, rather than sticking to certain groups as some golf club 'guns' are prone to do.

In his younger days Lavender was a member of Victoria's state squad and played interstate matches in what was then Victoria's Under-25 team. He won 11 Ivo Whitton events and in the early 1990s was beaten in a quarter-final of the Vic Amateur by a teenaged Andrew Getson, now Phil Mickelson's swing coach.

As familiar as Lavender has become around the pennant scene and such, so, too, has his caddie Matt Hodder, who's been carrying his bag for the best part of 34 years. Hodder won the club championship in 1962 and his father played in the Northern team that won the Division One pennant flag in 1940, to become the first non-sandbelt club to win Division One in the 20th century. It goes without saying they've gotten on pretty well together. "And we've won 23 championships between us," Lavender smiled.

*James Lavender is a student from the Thomson/Player school of golf.*

For a player of such ability, Lavender came to golf as a relatively late starter; he was going on 18 when a schoolmate invited him to come and have a hit one day after school.

Perhaps the choice of golf course – Royal Park – had something to do with what came after, for it was at that little nine-hole track across the road from the Melbourne Zoo that Australian golf legend Peter Thomson first laid club to ball.

Of course, Lavender is quick to point out that there can be no comparison but, funnily enough, when golfers who are familiar with his game are asked to describe it, Thomson's name often crops up.

Golf Victoria's Chief Operating Officer David Greenhill, who's seen Lavender play on countless occasions, mentioned how Thomson's golf practice consisted mainly of going out and playing. "You could probably say the same thing about James; he just plays golf, but he does everything extraordinarily well."

Long time Northern member and unofficial club historian Michael Church harbours similar thoughts. "I think he (Lavender) came from the Peter Thomson school of golf; hit it on the fairway, play to position, and play to the middle of the green."

Lavender acknowledges his golf philosophy is akin to Thomson's but says it was Thomson's great rival Gary Player who provided him with a role model. "The dad of one of my friends had videos of Player winning major championships and I just loved the way he hit the ball. Also he was smallish, like me, so his was a good game to try and follow."

Initially Lavender was self-taught but lessons from pros including Bill Wilson at Northern and noted north-eastern suburbs coach Jeff Boyle got him sorted, and he improved quickly. "My lowest handicap has been plus-three," he said.

Lavender won his first club championship in 1982 at Queenscliff, where his father Len was a member, but he kept getting pipped in the club championship at Northern until 1987, when he won what was one of the last to be played as matchplay.

"They changed it to strokeplay soon after that, and that was great for me; down the middle all the time, it fitted my game perfectly." The proof, as they say, is in the pudding because Lavender proceeded to win every club championship played at Northern during the 1990s – 10 in a row.

Younger players have emerged since 2000 to give him a run for his money but he won title number 22 last year, so you wouldn't want to bet against him adding to that tally.

"I DON'T  
THINK I  
COULD TELL  
YOU HOW  
MUCH I  
LOVE GOLF"



The fact he hits the ball further now than ever before has kept him competitive, despite the fact he hardly ever practises. Technological advances in equipment have helped, but for the past two years twice-a-week sessions at a Keiser gym in Essendon have built up his core strength and helped alleviate back problems.

"I practised a lot when I was young but once I started working and got married, I just couldn't find the time," he said. More recently his spare time has been further eroded running his own business Lavco Industries, founded 10 years ago to sell and distribute washroom equipment and commercial door hardware.

That it's been successful is no surprise. Lavender comes across as a quietly spoken, somewhat gentlemanly individual, but it hides a steely resolve and a strong self belief. "If you believe in yourself, you can knock anyone over; if you don't, you'll

never be any good. I always say, be very hard to beat, don't ever give up".

He tells the story of how, one day, before a pennant match against Kingswood at Commonwealth, he was asked by a spectator, one of Northern's older members Arthur Jones, who he was playing. "Brad Hughes," Lavender said, to which Jones replied, "Hmmm, I'll mark that one down as a loss then."

Lavender reckons that when someone says something like that to him, it just makes him go that much harder to prove them wrong. Hughes had recently won both the NZ and Victorian Amateur titles, but Lavender wasn't fazed.

Later on, after the match was completed, Jones spotted Lavender and asked him how he'd fared. "It was over on the 13th, mate," Lavender said. "Yep, I thought so," Jones replied, at which Lavender smiled, then said, "No, Arthur, all over for him."

Given his longevity, Lavender has been fortunate enough to have played against some of Australia's best ever golfers at a time when they were just starting to emerge as genuine talents, including the likes of US Open champ Geoff Ogilvy, Aaron Baddeley, Richard Green and Marc Leishman. But he ranks Stuart Appleby as, in his opinion, the best of them. "I loved the way he flew the ball, and he was a good thinker."

Lavender likes to tell a story of another of those budding champions, one that revolves around the Rosedale Open, an Ivo Whitton event that invariably attracted a top-notch amateur field.

"I'd always wanted to win it," Lavender said. "There were some great names on the trophy. I was beaten in a playoff in 1984 but in 1991 I finished eight under, which normally would have bolted in. Would you believe it, Robert Allenby birdied the last three holes and finished nine under." Less than a month later, Allenby finished runner-up to Wayne Riley in the 1991 Australian Open and the day after, turned pro.

You could argue Lavender probably deserved to win a state title, perhaps even a national one. Well, he still might. "I've started playing over-55 golf, and I'm enjoying it," he said.

He'll tee it up in the Victorian Senior Amateur later this year, and also the Australian Senior Amateur. And if he doesn't win one, it won't be for lack of trying.

# CREATE YOUR OWN CHALLENGE FOR THE LONGEST DAY!



GROWLING FROG GOLF COURSE  
RESTAURANT & CAFE

*The Longest Day provided the perfect opportunity for Ken Smyth to give to charity and get back into golf after recovering from cancer.  
Photograph: Paul Shire*



**The Longest Day golf marathon returns in 2018, bigger and better in its sixth year. Initially, the idea of the event was for golfers to complete 72 holes of golf in a day to help raise funds for vital Cancer Council Victoria skin cancer research. This year the emphasis is on creating the challenge of your choice.**

**Whether you play one round or complete all four, whether you form a relay, whether you play in a cart, walk it all or just some of the way, or whether you play on one course or over several, the emphasis is on having fun and raising funds for a cause that resonates with all who play our game. ANDREW MARMONT AND KAREN HARDING speak to some of the 2017 participants.**

### **Ken Smyth, *Growing Frog***

For Ken Smyth, golf has long been a joy in his world. But when he was diagnosed with bowel cancer two days before Christmas in 2010, that world was turned upside down. He spent the next six months in chemotherapy and golf was the furthest thing on his mind. Until he battled his way through and returned to the course.

"I'd always been a passionate golfer, and I was able to get back into it again," he says. "But after the cancer, I had a different mindset and I wanted to give back to the people who helped me survive. I looked for something that combined the two. I found The Longest Day and within minutes, I was signed up and looking for donations."

Ken initially aimed to raise \$500 playing at his home club Growing Frog in Yan Yean, but ended up with more than \$2000 in generous donations.

And the club supported him the whole way.

"The golf pro opened up early, and then I had support from trainee pros who walked with me," he says. "They came out and gave me towels as it was a hot day. Anyone walking on course - they said, if you see this guy, let him through."

Ken built up his conditioning slowly, playing 27 and 36 holes before the big day. He not only finished the 72 holes comfortably, but scored a total 153 stableford points, the highest aggregate scorer in the statewide challenge. He also finished runner-up in the fundraisers prize offered by Cancer Council Victoria, winning a Garmin GPS watch.

But the overall impact was an emotional one.

"When I started the day, I wasn't sure how I would go," he says. "But as the day went on, it gave me time to reflect on how lucky I am as a survivor, to still have the ability to enjoy life. Once I finished, I was physically and emotionally drained - but I had a sense of achievement."

"I would recommend anyone to have a go. You don't need to raise a lot, as a little donation from a lot of people will help find a cure, and the sense of satisfaction from doing this event will be like running a marathon."

"The Longest Day, to me, is an event where people can give thanks - and money - to all those involved with, or impacted by, cancer research and treatment."

### **Andrew Fox, *Team Sorrento***

The Fox family of the Fox Group is very private yet well known for its philanthropic work in the community. So, when asked by mother Paula to help raise money for skin cancer research by playing golf, Andrew Fox immediately agreed to her request.

"It was something she felt very passionate about; my wife has had melanomas, my mother has had melanomas, and we just thought, what a great thing to do."

When he said yes, he hadn't yet realised what he'd signed up to do. "I wasn't aware that we actually had to walk four rounds of golf - and did I plan that the day's temperature would be 34 degrees? No," he laughs. "But I don't hesitate when my mother asks me to do things for charity or that benefit the community."

While family and business commitments only allow him to play golf every six to eight weeks these days, Andrew is a fit man - he competed in the Virgin Money London Marathon in 2014, raising nearly \$203,000 for Dementia Australia - and he had some sturdy support on the day of the golf marathon.

Andrew played his four rounds in the company of son Harry, head pro Mark Williamson and general manager Michael Burgess. He also had the trainers who prepared him for the London Marathon decide to not only walk with the group but do 20 push-ups after every hole completed. That's 1440 push-ups all told - and on a hot day!

With generous support from connections in life and industry, Andrew amassed a whopping \$109,000, making him the top supporter for 2017 and helping Team Sorrento to the regional fundraiser prize after fellow team members added another \$31,000.

So now Andrew knows what's involved, will he do it again this year? "I'm probably an 80-90% chance of doing it again," he says. "I'm meeting with Andrew (Buxton) soon and I assume he's going to try and convince me to do it again. It's a great cause and I think it would be great to see it get more penetration."



*Andrew Fox was the top fundraiser last year.  
Photo courtesy Linfox Property Group*

## Adam Hill, *Team Anglesea-Portarlington*

Adam Hill remembers growing up in the 1970s. It was a simple, carefree time. It was also when the dangers of sunburn weren't known.

"I was born in the early '70s when there was no such thing as, 'let's go outside and put some sunscreen on'," he says.

"In the past, I've had some skin taken out of my shoulder and ever since then it's always been at the back of my mind. I've got kids of my own now and very rarely do we go outside with exposed skin. We always have sun hats and sunscreen on."

When a friend saw the Longest Day advertised on the Cancer Council Victoria Facebook page, the Portarlington member decided to enter.

"If we can get some family and friends to raise \$400-500, that would be great," he remembers thinking. "Thankfully, I was very fortunate to have some extremely good benefactors - and as a team, we came in at around \$2500. As a family, we try to give to as many charities as we can afford."

Despite being a self-proclaimed 'Sunday hacker', he played well, particularly during the first two rounds.

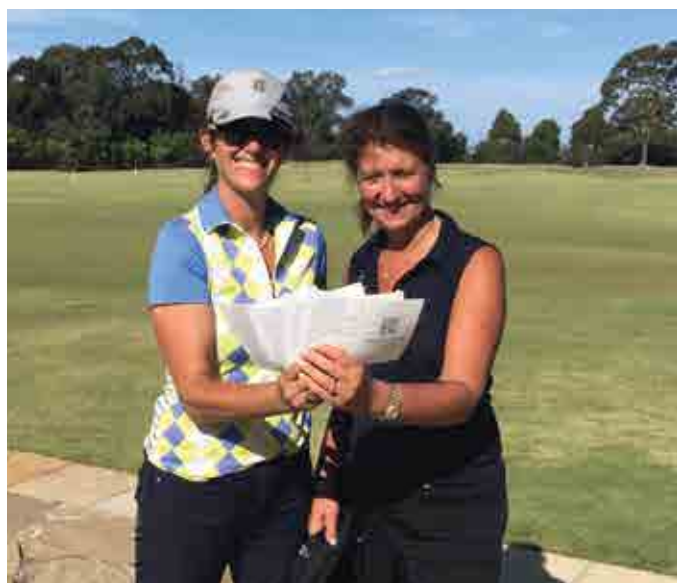
"It was a relaxed atmosphere," he says. "We actually played some good golf on the day. We played stableford and our scores were similar to being in competition. We were mid-30s in the first couple of rounds, then dropped off in the second two."

"Our families came down towards the end of the last round and watched us finish off. It was good to have them there and see us finish."

"Quite a few groups let us continue through, even though it interrupted their games on certain holes. We were given priority on the course on the day."

## Tania Smorgon, *The Kingston Heath Girls*

Tania Smorgon took up golf as an adult and quickly became passionate about it. So when good friend Andrew Buxton, one of the people behind the original concept, asked her to compete in the event, she was immediately interested.



Tania Smorgon (left) and Lorelle Krulis – sisters doing it for charity.

"He knew that I was a keen golfer, and he wanted a woman to do it, to show that women could do it," she says. "The first year, I was the first woman to do it. But now there are quite a few more."

Playing 72 holes in a day is a physical and mental challenge, according to Tania.

"It's like running a marathon," she says. "I've now done it three times. In 2015 I was on my own, and for the next two years my sister Lorelle has done it with me. I did the Longest Day for the first time when I was 50. It's do-able. Anyone can do it."

Tania enjoyed the experience so much, she is now a committee member for the event.

"My challenge now is to get more women to play it," she says.

"It's a great challenge. And your friends will all be really impressed. The interesting thing is, you think your golf would start to deteriorate as the fourth round comes along. But you play quite good golf."

## Kaylene Potter, *Team RACV Torquay 1*

Kaylene Potter has seen cancer affect many people throughout her life, including friends and family. So, as a member of RACV Torquay, she decided to take a group with her and sign up to the Longest Day.

"The reason we decided to do it was because we've all indirectly or directly been affected by cancer of some sort," she says.

"The two guys that played with us have actually had skin cancer and treatments done on their faces. I've had a number of friends who have gone through cancer, my husband as well. We've all been touched by it in some way. We thought it was a really good cause."

Her group of four started as the sun was rising and finished late into the day.

"We teed off at 5.45am and finished at 7.30pm that night. We walked the first round - about three hours - and we had carts for the other three rounds. We had a fantastic day, a great day out. A long day, but well worth it when you consider what cancer patients go through."

Like many other participants, Kaylene and her group were looked after by the club. It made the day - and the experience - so much more memorable and enjoyable.

"RACV Torquay were fantastic and so supportive," she says. "They donated the carts to us. And they sped the carts up for us so we could get through quicker."

Kaylene is ready to tackle the golf challenge again this year, but this time wants to get more golfers at the club involved too.

"The four of us have definitely committed to do it again, and hopefully a lot more people to get on board as well," she says.

## Wayne Ngo, *Team FWAnTastic 4, Riversdale*

The undulating hills of beautiful Riversdale are a playing challenge in themselves, let alone four rounds in one day. So when Andy Hung suggested to his mates Wayne Ngo, Frankie Wu and Teng Ung that they attempt the Longest Day, there was immediate enthusiasm for the cause but some discussion on the logistics.

"We thought it was a good idea and a good charity to support but we wondered whether we could actually pull it off. Initially, we thought we'd do the four rounds using carts but then we decided that was chickening out a little bit, so we opted to walk," says Wayne.

With support from both Riversdale and mates who walked with them for parts of the day, offering food, drink and encouragement, Team FWAnTastic – named using the first initial of each member – made three rounds, one in fairly quick time but the next two much slower due to other course traffic, before calling it a day. Considering the hills of their home course and that they went into the event “cold turkey” in terms of preparation, it was nonetheless a great effort.

For 2018 they will set themselves a different goal. “We might do a little bit of training beforehand this time and have a real crack,” Wayne says.

The four mates all agree on one thing. It was well worth it. “It was a real challenge; it was a bit of fun as well, a good excuse to spend the whole day playing golf, which is not a bad way to spend the day, and it was great to know that the money raised was going to a good cause,” says Wayne.



Team FWAnTastic, from left: Teng Ung, Wayne Ngo, Andy Hung and Frankie Wu gave it their best at Riversdale.

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## JOIN THE LONGEST DAY CHALLENGE

The Longest Day 2018 aims to raise \$400,000 to go towards vital skin cancer research. Golfers can take part either as individuals or part of a team.

While the aim of the challenge is to complete 72 holes on a single day, if you're unable to do the whole 72, set yourself a challenge at your own pace.

The official day for the challenge is December 17, however it can be played anytime in December so check your golf course for the most suitable times.

The campaign continues to grow each year with 183 participants in 2017, up 85% on the previous year. This year Cancer Council Victoria hopes 350-400 players will take part throughout Australia.

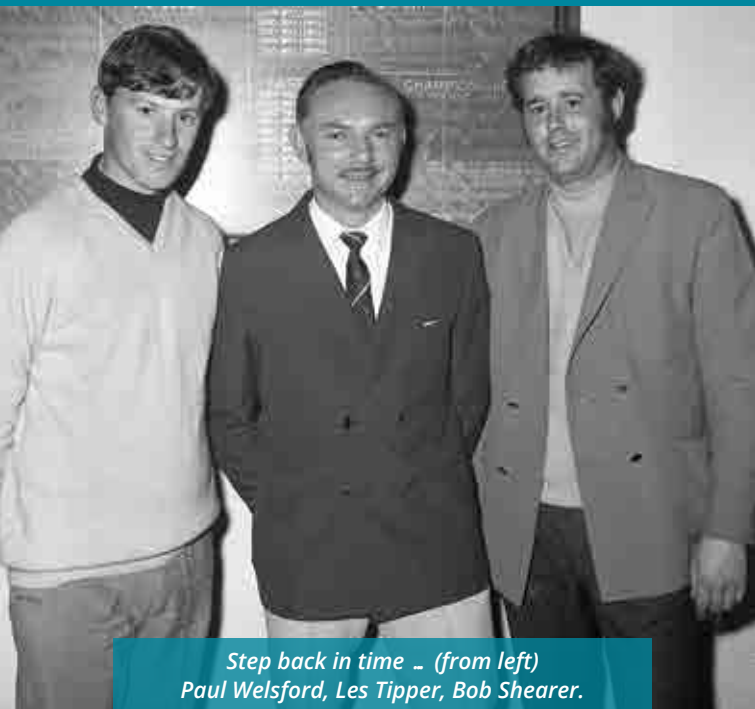
"All of us who have been involved in it - and it's the third year Golf Victoria has been - are pretty excited about the direction it is heading," says David Greenhill, Golf Victoria's Chief Operating Officer.

"Not only is it a great cause, but it encourages golfers to push themselves from a golf perspective, and from a physical perspective, that they might not otherwise want to do.

"The golf challenge itself and the time of year it's played, just before Christmas and around the summer solstice, has added up to something golf is going to be really proud of going into the future."

For further information or to register, go to [www.longestday.org.au](http://www.longestday.org.au)

# BAIRNSDALE TOURNAMENT 100 NOT OUT



*Step back in time ... (from left) Paul Welsford, Les Tipper, Bob Shearer.*



*Another from the archives (from left) Sadie Watts, Sara Love, Shirley McKenzie, Dawn Wight.*

**The annual tournament week is a staple of many country golf clubs, but few can boast a history as long as Bairnsdale in East Gippsland. ANDREW MARMONT reports on the club's plan to celebrate the milestone in style.**

They don't put up tents in the car park anymore, but in the 1960s that's exactly what scores of golfers and their families did at Bairnsdale Golf Club, camping out for a whole week because they didn't want to miss playing in the club's annual tournament.

Chris Savige and his family were among those making the trek to Bairnsdale, about 300 kilometres south of Melbourne; his dad playing, the kids helping to caddy.

"People would camp on the golf course in their hundreds," Savige, now a local golf historian, recalled.

Bairnsdale Golf Club has a big week of events planned to celebrate 100 years of annual golf tournaments, this year's running from Monday October 29 through to Sunday November 4.

Tournament chair Peter Wilson and his team of six have spent the past eight months working on ways to do the Gippsland club's milestone justice. There is an impressive line-up of sponsors, headed by the Peter Dullard

Motor Group, and an extensive program that both nods to the past and looks ahead to the future.

There's also the chance to win big for some low scoring.

"The tournament golf program starts off on the Monday with a Former Champions day and we will provide a trophy to the former champion who leads the field," Wilson said.

"We've got the usual ambrose, a 27-hole ladies' day and also a 27-hole men's day later in the week. I've also been able to get a \$10,000 sponsorship for a hole-in-one, which will be available on those two days."

The club has a commemorative dinner planned, which includes presentations,

a run through the tournament history and special acknowledgements to past winners.

"We've invited as many former champions as we could find, senior officials, the local mayor and people from the district association," Wilson said. "And we'll introduce the former champions who are present with a trophy."

What's the secret to a continuing century of tournaments?

Savige has watched its progression closely. He has been involved in the tournament for 50 years, initially as a caddy for his father in the 1960s, then as a player and now as a historian.

During the 1940s, the tournament qualified for Ivo Whitton status, which automatically attracted the best amateurs from across the land. Whitton was the benchmark for Victorian golfers in the 1920s, and the Ivo Whitton trophy was a big drawcard.

"The state was handicapped against him," Savige said. "Golf tournaments pre-Second World War were also popular because they were social affairs."

*It complements an excellent period for the club, which in 2017 received Golf Victoria Golf Club of the Year, while new general manager Jeff Graham took out the award for Golf Manager of the Year.*

Throughout his time at the club, Savige has seen his share of star Australian golfers play at Bairnsdale.

"Bob Shearer (a PGA Tour winner) used to come and play," he said. "Bill Britton in the early 1970s won it too. Fred Morecroft would have been the best-credentialed golfer in the country at the time. He was the first golfer to win the country championship three times in Victoria."

Savige believes the secret to the Bairnsdale tournament's longevity is because it was a good fundraising activity and because players wanted to win there.

"Tournaments serve two purposes," he said. "One - to raise money. Going way back, they weren't there to raise money, but were open championships played across 36, 54 or 72 holes. Players sought those victories. In recent years, they are more about fundraisers. The focus is now more about raising money."

Bairnsdale's annual tournament usually makes about \$5000 and it is hoped the centenary event will double that.

It complements an excellent period for the club, which in 2017 received Golf Victoria Golf Club of the Year, while new general manager Jeff Graham took out the award for Golf Manager of the Year.

Golf Australia magazine rated Bairnsdale

as one of Australia's best courses to play for under \$50, noting its "beautifully maintained couch fairways and some of the best greens in all of Gippsland."

"We are building our five-year strategic plan, and our 100-year tournament is going to be an opportunity and celebration to kick that process off," said Stephen Mann, Club President.

"It's an exciting week. It's an opportunity for our members and players from other clubs to play on our course, which is rated pretty highly by pros and people who play in the pro-am.

"It's nice to get a few people around, to come and experience it."

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Plus, **\$1,000 cash** is available for the first (1st) Hole-In-One by a Lady competitor, and the first (1st) Hole-In-One by a Man competitor during the Tournament, other than those competitors who achieve the \$10,000 prizes.

Club Contacts:

Ph: 03 5156 6252 Fax: 03 5156 0235

Email: [club@bairnsdalegolf.com.au](mailto:club@bairnsdalegolf.com.au)

[www.bairnsdalegolf.com.au](http://www.bairnsdalegolf.com.au)



Tournament Secretary: Judy Stewart

Ph: 03 5157 1324

Mobile: 0428 571 324

[stocktonmerino@wideband.net.au](mailto:stocktonmerino@wideband.net.au)

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# SENIORS CHASE STATE TITLE

*Never too old for a lesson... Ian McCleary has used a tip from a legend to take on the senior circuit. Photo: Daniel Pockett*

## The Victorian Senior Amateur Championships are on in September. STEVE PERKIN speaks to the two tearaway leaders on the senior orders of merit about their favourite senior moments.

Ian McCleary was hitting some practice balls about eight months ago when a bloke who knows a bit about the game strolled past.

The elderly chap observed Ian's swing. "Your hands are too low," he volunteered and, taking a club, he demonstrated. "This is where they are and this is where they should be."

Ian's free lesson came from Kevin Hartley, a former Australian Amateur champion, a 10-time winner of the Riversdale Cup and one of the most respected coaches in the business.

"When the advice comes from somebody like Kevin Hartley," Ian said, "you listen. So I went away and, although it felt funny, I stuck with it and then, one day, it just clicked."

The results have been dramatic. A very decent single-figure player, Ian has steamrolled through amateur events this season and at the time of writing leads the Doug Bachli Order of Merit for Victorian senior players.

The 56-year-old will tee up in the Victorian Senior Amateur Championships in September as one of the favourites for the men's title.

He played in the event for the first time last year and was tied for the lead going

into the final round before finishing a creditable fourth.

"It's a very competitive tournament with some really good players and something I'd love to win."

Currently a one-handicapper at Kooringal Golf Club, Ian is ranked 32nd nationally and in the top-10 in Victoria in senior rankings. He has won six tournaments already this year and leads the Order of Merit by a whopping 1100 points.

You don't get into such positions without some hard work.

A good cricketer, Ian took up golf seriously when his days with bat and ball ended. Now he plays about three rounds a week and chips and putts most other days.

His son, Adam, is a former Victorian Junior team captain who is returning to the game after wrist injuries.

# HELEN'S A COUNTRY LEGEND

If you're looking for success stories in the ranks of women's senior golf in Victoria, Helen Pascoe's name will certainly be in the frame.

Since the Moyne Senior Classic last November through to the Tocumwal Senior Amateur title in June this year, Helen played in 18 senior tournaments and won an incredible 13 of them. Her worst finish has been third.

By any standards, that's a remarkable achievement and makes the 61-year-old Ballarat resident one of the favourites for the Victorian Senior Amateur Championship in September.

And if she does win, it won't be the first time. Played by the women since 1931, Helen won the championship last year at Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale, and in 2014 at Curlewis.

Currently a two-handicap player at Buninyong Golf Club and a member of Southern Golf Club's Division One pennant team, Helen started playing golf as a junior at Snake Valley, 30km west of Ballarat.

When her hockey and tennis days finished because of physical wear-and-tear, she concentrated on golf and she now plays three or four rounds a week.

Around Ballarat, her golfing exploits are legendary. She has been the Buninyong ladies' champion 14 times and the Ballarat District champion 12 times, to name just 26 of her achievements.

A maths teacher, Helen's win at Curlewis in 2014 was her third try at the state title and it was, to say the least, emphatic.

After rounds of 78 and 74, Helen qualified for the matchplay rounds and won 6&4

over Alison Sinclair in her semi-final and 7&5 over Mandy Buckley in the final.

Last year's win, where Helen was ranked number one, was a much tougher affair. Her semi-final against Elizabeth Smyth went to the 19th, while the final against Jo Sellen ended with a one-up victory on the 18th.

"Winning this year is going to be very tough. With the event being played at Shepparton Golf Club and Hill Top Golf Club, in Tatura, we might see a number of players from New South Wales come down to play."

Although this year's event is firmly in her sights, Helen is also looking ahead to selection in an Australian team to play in a new trans-Tasman match against New Zealand scheduled for October.

"To play in that, I must be ranked in the top four nationally and I think I'm currently second. Playing in that is certainly a goal."



*Trophy magnet... Helen Pascoe just keeps on adding to her list of tournament victories. Photo Paul Shire*

## 2018 VIC SENIOR AMATEUR

The Victorian Senior Amateur Championships have been contested since 1931 for women and 1995 for men.

Played previously as standalone events, the men's and women's championships combined in 2015 to be played at the same venue within the same week.

The Women's Championship is played over 36 holes stroke, followed by matchplay for the top four qualifiers. The Men's Championship is played over 54 holes strokeplay.

Both events award trophies for gross and nett age categories (55-59, 60-64, 65-59 and 70+).

This year, the event is being played at Shepparton and Hill Top Golf Club from September 10 to 12. Entries close August 24.

Enter online at [www.golfvic.org.au/senioram](http://www.golfvic.org.au/senioram)

# SHORT GAME SKILLS PAR EXCELLENCE

Piper Stubbs has been taking consistent strides throughout her fledgling career but none bigger than the 15-year-old's performance in open company, winning the Victorian Women's Par 3 Championship at Kyabram Parkland in June.

Stubbs not only carried a one-shot lead overnight and pulled away from some experienced rivals but went the whole tournament without a single double-bogey on her card.

While her four-shot win was relatively comfortable, the men's tournament was a thriller, with young Gardiners Run talent Darren Makin coming from four shots behind to grab a one-shot victory.



*Piper Stubbs (left) and Darren Makin with their trophies.*



*Tyana Phan after her 1-in-36,000 shot.*

Throw in a tournament-first hole-in-one for Churchill-Waverley junior Tyana Phan and the Par 3 week was a tremendous showcase of the short game skills of Victoria's budding stars.

Stubbs has been on a golden run through the winter. After making the Junior Girls state team for the first time in April and playing at number one for Huntingdale in her first metropolitan pennant Division One final in May, she showed the benefit of the experience with a seasoned display around the Parkland course. Then in July she rattled off three successive wins in junior tournaments at Keysborough, Woodlands and Yarrowonga.

At Kyabram, she led overnight by a shot from defending champion and four-time winner of the tournament, Jess Pickwick, and held up under the pressure with a 58 on the second day and a 36-hole total of 118. Steffanie Vogel was second on 122, one shot ahead of her Victorian women's state teammate Pickwick and Tyana Phan, who won the best nett and a special place in the tournament's history.

First held at Kyabram Parkland in 2005 for men and 2006 for women, the Par 3 Championship had never produced a hole-in-one – until Phan aced the 14th with what has been estimated as about the 36,000th attempt.

In the men's event, played with two rounds on the Saturday and a final round on Sunday, Jake Fullarton from Gardiners Run held a one-shot overnight lead over David Walker from The Heritage, with Makin and Jasper Stubbs, brother of Piper, making up the final group of four.

Going down the last, Makin led by one shot to Walker, who was one clear of Fullarton, and when Fullarton birdied, Makin needed to make par to avoid a three-way playoff. He got the job done, winning with rounds of 60, 54, 56 for a total of 170.

Stubbs couldn't pull off a tournament family double, finishing sixth, but that achievement would come a month later when both he and Piper won the Yarrowonga Junior Open.



# ANGUS & ANDY A PAIR OF ACES



*Andy Lockey (left) and Angus Smith in the clubhouse after their ace round.*

A hole-in-one is a rare enough feat on its own. Two players hitting an ace on the same course on the same day is usually only seen occasionally. So how about two on the same day within the same group?

Warburton Golf Club's members don't recall anything like it – but that's exactly what happened in June, when Angus Smith holed out on the club's fifth hole and his playing partner Andy Lockey matched it a couple of hours later on the 15th.

Neither player actually saw their ball fall into the cup. Fourteen-year-old Angus didn't think he'd hit it hard enough on the long uphill fifth. "It bounced a few metres before the green," he said. "It sort of looked good when I hit it but we thought maybe it was a bit short.

"When we walked up we couldn't see it anywhere and Andy said he'd look in the hole. When he said it was in there I didn't believe him at first.

"He had a look as if to say, 'idiot!'" recalled Lockey. "I got more pleasure

from the look on his face than I did from my own hole-in-one."

Lockey, who joined Warburton as soon as he moved over from the UK 14 years ago – even before finding a place to live – had been playing for 45 years without even seeing a hole-in-one. So seeing his friend's grandson score his first ace was surely enough excitement for the day. But the golfing gods had other ideas when he arrived at the 15th, another uphill par three.

"I hit my tee shot but had no idea. There was a guy coming down the 14th, though, and he was really excited. He said he saw the ball go in and looked up to see who was chipping and couldn't see anyone and then saw us on the tee."

"I was absolutely gobsmacked. You could hit the best tee shot of your life and never expect it to actually go in, so to have two of them from the group go in on the one day was just amazing."



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# THE TWINKLERS

Continuing our look at some of the little stars that shine so brightly as they start out in golf.



## HAYDEN FARMER

AGE: 11

You know that sound the club makes with the ball when you find the sweet spot? That is Hayden Farmer's favourite sound. Hayden is a MyGolfer from Morack Golf Club and has been playing for four years. He loves heading down for lessons to learn new things and to get better with his coach Ben Bunny and Brian Fitzgerald. Rory McIlroy is Hayden's favourite player, probably because hitting the ball straight and far is one of his favourite things to do, just like Rory does.

## MILA STONE

AGE: 9

Mila Stone loves cartwheels, art and footy but golf is starting to take flight. Mila has been part of the MyGolf program at Victoria Golf Club for a year. She finds golf fun and says she loves everything about the game because of her teacher Nick Drane. Her favourite player is Tiger Woods because he hits it far, just like Mila can!





**In our regular column highlighting some of the brightest young talent in Victorian golf, LUKE DODEMAIDE profiles Star On The Rise, Alessandra Nagayo.**

Davao City in the Philippines is a long way from the top-tier facilities of Rowville Sports Academy – 5400 kilometres to be exact – and in many ways the gulf may be even wider.

Talented 14-year-old Alessandra Nagayo has gone from navigating year-round humid weather, with “no winters at all”, to the infamous four-seasons-in-one-day nature of Melbourne. She has also done so with a new level of self-sufficiency.

“In Davao City, I had a maid, a driver and a caddie,” Alessandra says. “Here, I have just myself. It has made me be more independent.”

She has been well supported by her parents who moved to Melbourne, preferring it over other destinations like South Korea and the United States, so she could chase her golfing dream. Her father Danny works in the health industry and maintains Alessandra’s diet, while her mother Rachel was a hard-working councillor in the Philippines, instilling a sense of dedication.

What Alessandra enjoys most about Melbourne, and what her parents sought when making the move two years ago, is the strong team of coaches and instructors at Rowville Sports Academy, headed by Tim Wendel and Trevor Flakemore. Alessandra credits the coaches with not just improving her golfing game but her sense of confidence and self-esteem.

“There has been a big improvement since going to Rowville,” Alessandra says. “They have helped me understand golf and given me confidence. I can compete, think for myself, and make better life choices.”

Alessandra’s grasp on the English language, aided by her schooling in the Philippines, is exceptional. And she is typically self-assured when asked about her career goals: “Someday I hope to be playing on the LPGA Tour.”

Counting Tiger Woods and Michelle Wie among her idols, Alessandra’s roll call of accomplishments back up the lofty standards she’s set for herself: competing in amateur events since the age of nine, tackling the US Kids Golf Championships at Pinehurst, North Carolina, in 2015 and the Veritas World Junior Tournament in Columbus, Ohio, that same year. She also featured in the IMG Academy Junior World Championships and FCG International Junior Golf Championships, both in San Diego, California, in 2016.

This year, she won the School Sports Victoria Girls Championship, along with a host of club events, and the Southern Golf Club member has twice qualified for the 15-and-Under Golf Victoria Junior State Team. Alessandra, who plays off scratch, says the best part of her game is her fairway play and ability to make greens in regulation.

“My driving and putting, though, might need some work,” she says. That doesn’t stop Alessandra from targeting consistency as her number one priority. “I want to shoot 75 and below,” she says. “Preferably 72.”

First and foremost, Alessandra stresses that the reason she plays golf is because she absolutely adores the sport. “I can compete and have fun in golf,” she says. “I love playing golf. I just love it.”



# NULLARBOR AT 90



*Betty Higgs took up golf at 65 and a quarter of a century later, she still loves the game.*

**A member of one of Victoria's smallest and oldest golf clubs, Betty Higgs lives for big and new challenges. At 90, she crossed the Nullarbor Plain, playing the world's longest golf course. JOHN MACK spoke to her about her adventure of a lifetime.**

When it was Betty Higgs' turn to address her local women's discussion group on 'Big O birthdays', she had no problem finding material. She simply told her fellow members how she had just returned home after playing the world's longest golf course, two months after she turned 90.

She told them how she, two of her daughters and a granddaughter set off from the tiny Victorian town of Arnold and drove more than 2700km to Kalgoorlie in WA so Betty could play the Nullarbor Links.

The Nullarbor Links, billed as the world's longest golf course, consists of 18 holes stretching 1365 kilometres along the Eyre Highway, crossing the Nullarbor Plain through South Australia and Western Australia.

It's an adventure described by Links organisers as "a quintessential Australian golfing experience unmatched anywhere in the world".

"I'd read about the golf course, so I put it on my bucket list," Betty said. "My daughter Tammy also had a yen to

drive across the Nullarbor and we were talking one Sunday and we said, 'Let's do it'. That's how it came about."

Betty's Nullarbor golf adventure lasted four days and she was accompanied by Tammy, 19-year-old granddaughter Tess and another daughter Sonya, who played the holes with her.

"We played ambrose and we had 60 and 63 on the two nines," Betty said. "It was a wonderful experience."

The trip west was made in Sonya's car and they took their time crossing the Nullarbor, starting in Ceduna and finishing in Kalgoorlie. "We stopped at each golf hole and it took between 20 and 30 minutes to play each one," Sonya said. "The other two kind of hung around while Mum and I played.

"We didn't par any holes but it was fun. When we'd finished, Mum, Tammy and Tess all flew back home and my husband Paul flew to Perth and drove back with me."

A four-day golfing expedition to the other side of the country is nothing to a dynamo like Betty Higgs, who climbed Sydney Harbour Bridge to mark her 80th birthday.

She and late husband Cam raised four daughters and two sons and Betty now has 16 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren, and keeps in touch with them all.

Betty – Nana Betsy to many of her friends – lost Cam 14 years ago and now lives on her own on the family farm at Arnold, a tiny town about 10km out of Bridgewater. Son Billy and his family live about 500 metres away and keep an eye out for her as she goes about her busy schedule.

Betty loads her clubs and buggy into the back of her ute every Wednesday and drives the 18km to the Bridgewater-on-Loddon club, which has only five female and three male members and 18 sandscrape greens.

She walks nine holes of the course with 80-year-old mate Margaret Falla and sometimes fills in as an emergency for pennant. "I've played twice for one win and one loss," she said.

The rest of Betty's week is filled by voluntary work at an Inglewood hospital on Monday, Tai Chi sessions and monthly CWA meetings at Newbridge on Tuesday, exercise and sometimes

discussion group Care and Share on Thursdays and op shop volunteer work in Bridgewater on Friday.

And occasionally she rides 20km to Bridgewater and back on her bike for coffee with friends at the bakery. Before heading home from her Nullarbor trip, Betty spent four days in Fremantle and did the bike ride, about 20 kilometres, around Rottnest Island.

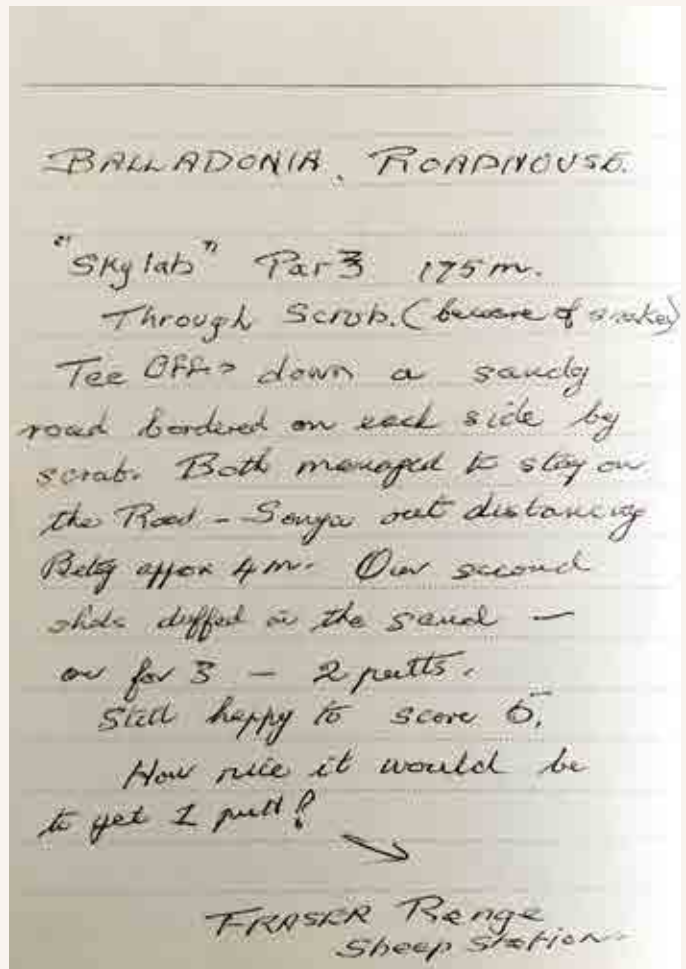
Betty took up golf after retiring from teaching at Bridgewater primary school when she was 65. She then helped out for a time with Volunteer for Isolated Students' Education and she and Cam travelled a lot, she tutoring and he working as a general hand on various properties.

It was during these travels that she discovered golf and although Cam wasn't interested, it became a huge part of Betty's life. "I love the game and it's good to get out into the open and get some exercise," she said.

Sonya is in awe of her mother's energy and her determination not to give in to her age. "She's a goer," said Sonya, the only one of Betty's children who plays golf. "She has loved golf from the very start and it



Betty kept a record of each of her 18 holes.  
Photo and diary image courtesy Sonya Linehan.



has been an important and wonderful part of her life for 25 years. She doesn't hit long but she usually hits straight.

"Mum never misses a golf day at Bridgewater and when the weather is really hot, she gets there in time to start at 7.30am. She wouldn't dream of using a golf cart as she loves to walk.

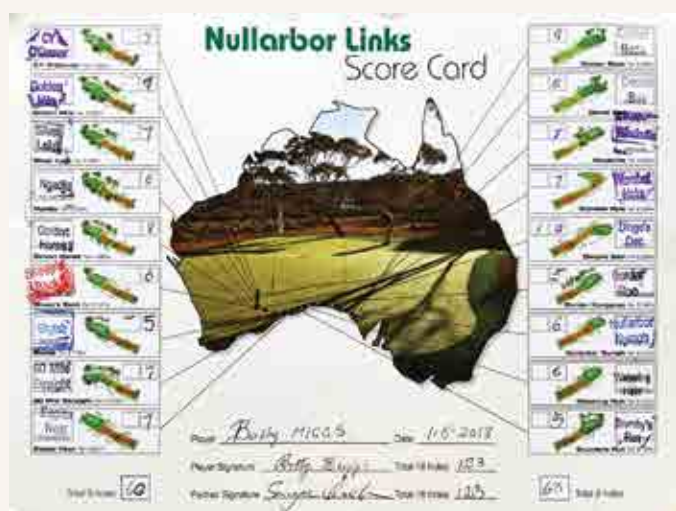
"Mum likes to test herself and she also loves the community engagement that comes with golf. Ask her to do anything and she'll just do it. She doesn't like a lot of fuss as she thinks she's just 'normal'."

Margaret Falla agrees. "I complain about the bit I have to do around my house but she has so much more to do on the farm and she gets it done," she said. "She digs out thistles in the paddocks and things like that.

"Betty is only tiny but her motto is 'A little bit, a lot of the time'. She can do anything ... she's amazing and a lovely lady."

So, after Sydney Harbour Bridge at 80 and the Nullarbor Links at 90, what's Betty Higgs planning for her 100th birthday?

"Just getting there," she said.



Hole 18: CY O'Connor, Kalgoorlie GC.  
Photo courtesy Sonya Linehan

## BRIDGEWATER ON LODDON CENTENARY

Just weeks after celebrating her 90th birthday, Betty Higgs was celebrating the 100th anniversary of her golf club. Bridgewater on Loddon, an 18-hole sandscrape course on the Bridgewater Recreation Reserve, began as a nine-hole course in 1918 and was affiliated with the Victorian Golf Association in 1922.

Today, there are just eight members of the club, five women and three men, but past members and those from neighbouring clubs joined in the celebrations on June 5, with a 4BBB mens and ladies event. A 100-year celebratory cake was cut at the afternoon tea following play.

## NULLARBOR LINKS – PLAIN AND SIMPLE

The Nullarbor Links is an 18-hole golf course spanning 1365 kilometres along the Eyre Highway from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia to Ceduna in South Australia.

There are holes in 15 participating towns or roadhouses along the highway, with two holes at three of the venues. Seven of the holes are on existing courses and the other 11 were created specially, with a tee and a green at each site and natural terrain fairways.

The average distance between holes is 66 kilometres and two of the holes are almost 200 kilometres apart.

Players who want evidence they have played the course can buy a scorecard for \$70 at either Kalgoorlie or Norseman golf clubs at the western end or Ceduna Visitors Centre at the eastern end.

The idea came from Alf Caputo and Bob Bongiorno, both members of the Eyre Highway Operators Association, over a bottle of red wine at the Balladonia Roadhouse in 2006.

They saw the concept as a way of slowing down tourists as they crossed the Nullarbor and encouraging them to spend more time and money in the region.

And that plan seems to have worked, as about 12,000 people have paid the \$70 'green fee' since the course opened in October 2009, an estimated half of those from overseas.

The course record is 70, set in April this year by Hayley Bettencourt, a professional from Mandurah in WA.

"I'd read about the golf course, so I put it on my bucket list," Betty said. "My daughter Tammy also had a yen to drive across the Nullarbor and we were talking one Sunday and we said, 'let's do it'. That's how it came about."

*Betty Higgs is still looking for new challenges.*



## PERFECT TIME TO PLAY

# Royal Portrush

With the Open Championship returning to Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland in 2019 – for the first time in 68 years – there will never be a better opportunity for golfers to tick their bucket list with a tour to the historic courses of Northern Ireland and Scotland.

GOLFSelect has secured tee times to play Royal Portrush just a week after the Open – an extraordinary coup to play one of the world's absolute standout courses in its standout peak condition.

Set high on the north coast near the famous Giant's Causeway, Royal Portrush is the perfect combination of majesty and history. It was the first club to hold a professional tournament in Northern Ireland in 1895, the first outside England

to hold the British Ladies Championship, also in 1895, and the first and only course off the British mainland to host the Open Championship in 1951.

The GOLFSelect escorted trip gives attendees the opportunity to take in the Friday and Sunday of the 148th Open before catching the ferry to the west coast of Scotland to play three other Open venues, Royal Troon, Turnberry and Prestwick (home of the first 13 Open Championships).

There's also an optional round at Western Gailes before the tour returns to Northern Ireland to play Royal Portrush before two rounds at the course rated by many as the number one in the world, Royal County Down.

There's also a round at Royal Belfast and an optional round at Portstewart.

Accommodation is in keeping with the quality of the courses – the Bushmills Inn with its famous distillery for Royal Portrush, the exclusive Slieve Donard Hotel at the foot of the Mourne Mountains for Royal County Down, in Belfast the Titanic Hotel, across the road from the Titanic Museum, and the five-star Trump Turnberry for the Scottish courses.

Over 13 nights, with luxury transfers and limited to 16 places, it truly is a rare golf opportunity open to singles, couples and non-golfing partners. For more information, go to <http://www.golfselect.com.au/open2019>

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# WHAT PRICE PRINCIPLES?

There are moments of introspection when conclusions so often lead to difficult decision-making for those running golf's professional circuits.

Does any tour exist as a vehicle for competitive sport in its purest, most incorruptible form? Or, as some might argue, is that noble ideal diluted by an understandable and practical need to be seen more as a segment of the so-called 'entertainment business'?

Or are the weekly tournaments a necessary blend of those constituent parts; a bit of both, depending on circumstances?

Not so long ago, officialdom on the PGA and European Tours had occasion to ask themselves those sorts of deep and meaningful questions. Intriguingly, they came to diametrically opposite conclusions.

The PGA Tour was up first. When Martin Kaymer failed to qualify for the 2015 Fed-Ex Cup 'playoffs', the 2014 US Open and Players champion was unable to fulfill the minimum number of tournament starts (15) required of every tour member.

So what happened? Not much, other than the PGA Tour applied its own regulations and informed Kaymer that he would not be a card-carrying member in 2016.

All of which was fair enough, both to Kaymer and every other PGA Tour player. Membership comes with obligations as well as privileges. Besides, the rules are pretty clear and the German screwed up. To his credit, he had no complaints. Or cares.

"I was suspended from the tour for a year, but I could not have cared less," he says. "It was fine. We have so many great events in Europe, so it was okay. But the way the PGA Tour handled it was a bit strange. I saw through social media that I was suspended. Before that, I didn't even know. But they have their rules. I didn't play the required number of events. So I was out for a year. No problem."

Indeed, it was not. Kaymer's reduced status didn't make much of a difference to his US schedule and in practical terms it was far more important that he maintain his exalted position inside the top 50 on the world-ranking list.



Still, the point here is that then-PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem wasn't tempted to make a special case of Kaymer, no matter how recently he had won the biggest event on the PGA Tour.

All of which was in complete contrast to the verdict reached by the European Tour's executive director, Keith Pelley, when Europe's best player Rory McIlroy found himself unable to tee-up in more than 12 tour events that same year (the minimum was 13).

Blatantly breaking his own rules, Pelley announced that McIlroy – who had been out of action for a month because of injury – would nevertheless be allowed to tee up in the season-ending DP World Championship in Dubai.

That invitation event is only open to the top 60 players on the 'Race to Dubai', a status McIlroy could not have attained had the rules of eligibility been applied as written. And there were other complications, as agent Chubby Chandler was quick to point out.

At the time that McIlroy's 'special exemption' was announced, one of Chandler's then clients, soon-to-be Masters champion Danny Willett, lay second behind the Irishman on the money list. If McIlroy's lead had held until the end of the season, Willett would have missed out on the sizeable bonus he should have received for finishing first on what used to be the Order of Merit. All because the European Tour moved the goalposts after the game had begun.

On the face of it, Willett could have sued the tour for breach of contract, as could the unfortunate individual who pulled up in 61st place on the ranking. Surprisingly, the European Tour did not expand the starting line-up to 61 in recognition of those special circumstances, so Raphael Jacquelin was sitting at home rather than competing in Dubai as he would have done had McIlroy been excluded.

Then there was the predicament Ian Poulter found himself in when, for the first time in 11 years, he dropped out of the world

top-50 in the week of the 2015 Hong Kong Open. Poulter's sudden lack of prominence made him ineligible for the upcoming HSBC Championship in Shanghai, an event he had to play in if he wished to fulfill that now-infamous 13-event minimum.

At which point the European Tour stepped up, albeit not quite to the same extent as it had done for McIlroy. Knowing that Poulter was too late to enter Hong Kong and that all the sponsor invitations had been allocated, the tour asked former USPGA champion Rich Beem to give up his spot to the Englishman. Only when the Sky Sports commentator agreed to do so was Poulter able to tee up and, more importantly, maintain his eligibility for tour membership – and the Ryder Cup side – in 2016.

Okay, how do we feel about all this? Was the European Tour right to have different rules for different folks, depending on their level of celebrity and appeal to tournament sponsors? Or were their actions merely acknowledgement of a commercial reality that overrides an inherent unfairness on what should, ideally, be a level playing field? And what about the hard-asses at the PGA Tour? Should they have been more understanding of Kaymer's predicament?

The key, at least for this observer, is the relative standing of each tour and, crucially, their relationships with the Ryder Cup.

The PGA Tour cares not a jot about the biennial contest for the simple reason it has no financial interest in what has become the fifth-biggest event on golf. So it is safe to assume it would have treated one of Uncle Sam's nephews in the same way it dealt with Kaymer.

The European Tour, on the other hand, relies to an unhealthy extent on the income derived from the home Ryder Cup matches that come along every four years. So it needs its best players to play.

As ever folks, money spoke – silently in the US and loudly in Europe.



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