

GOLF

VICTORIA

February / March 2019
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ISPS HANDA VIC OPEN:
**CELINE & DAVID'S
SIGNPOST FOR
THE FUTURE**

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Front cover: Celine and David's
Vic Open Signpost for the Future
Photo: Paul Shire

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Simon Brookhouse
General Manager – Golf Operations, Golf Australia

Teamwork the Key to National Golf Structure

Now that the dust has settled following the completion of the ISPS Handa Women's Australian Open and the ISPS Handa Vic Open, I have had some time to reflect on the great success of both events. There is no doubt that when you have the privilege of playing golf tournaments on high quality golf courses such as The Grange and 13th Beach Golf Links, the fans experience excellent golf in a great atmosphere, which no doubt makes the tournaments so successful.

The purpose of this piece is not to dwell on the success of the events but to speak about the integration of the One Golf model and how it has impacted not only on these events but on golf in general. Since October 1 2018, the five states and territories (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and Northern Territory) have become fully integrated into Golf Australia, bringing together 90 staff from around the nation to drive the growth of golf in this country.

The two tournaments mentioned have been the first events on which the new structure has had a major impact and, can I say, it was extremely successful. Whilst much of the reasoning behind the One Golf model was based on better governance, more efficient operations and a streamlined approach to managing golf in this country, there is no doubt that the impact on the staff has been a positive one and to bring the new team together to run these two events was a highlight for me and for Golf Australia.

The collaboration and opportunities these two events showcased was a testament to

the new structure. To see a truly national Operations Team work together to put on both events after only forming in October was outstanding. Everyone in the team had their part to play and delivered wholeheartedly. Add to this the interaction of the national Development, Marketing and Communications, and Commercial teams and success of the events was there for the world to see. The ability to provide opportunities for staff from all around the country to experience world class events and share best practice from their own experiences is invaluable and stands as one of the greatest early successes of the One Golf model.

In addition to the camaraderie exhibited by all the staff on the ground, in the short time since the restructure Golf Australia has been able to deepen its relationships with many existing commercial partners including ISPS Handa, TAC, Isuzu Trucks, Drummond Golf and build new partnerships with world class partners such as Qatar Airways. The ability to have one voice for golf has no doubt made these existing relationships not only stronger but enabled Golf Australia to be noticed by new global brands. This is something that is not lost when we can broadcast two great golf tournaments all around the globe.

There have been many other great opportunities for our staff since the transition in October which may be as simple as learning a better way to do things from an interstate colleague or experiencing a development clinic at an interstate golf club.

One thing is certain - we have great people who are relishing the opportunities and have adapted well to monumental change in our industry and as a group are all excited about what the future must bring.

It would be ignorant of me to say everything has been perfect throughout the transition process, however when merging six companies into one, there is always the risk of some things not working out perfectly. Having said that, the issues that have arisen through the process have been minor and have been dealt with in a swift and professional manner.

The experiences of the last four months have reinforced the view that a truly national structure is the best way for our sport to grow. There is more work to be done to achieve this truly national model and we all look forward to the continued work with Golf Western Australia and Golf New South Wales to make this possible. We hope their staff, too, can share in these exciting times.

The full implementation of a truly national organisation will make golf an even better "Game for Life".



GolfAustralia



Victoria and the Vic Open represents the future of golf



MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

As we reflect on yet another outstanding ISPS Handa Vic Open, there's just one place to start. And that's by congratulating this year's champions, Celine Boutier and David Law.

Both are first-time winners. Both secured tightly contested victories.

And both are at the beginning of what will undoubtedly be promising professional careers.

But the success of this year's Vic Open is not just down to the players.

David and Celine, together with the rest of this year's field, enjoyed the impeccable 13th Beach Golf Links on the beautiful Bellarine Peninsula.

Not very many courses could host two tournaments, side-by-side, with such ease.

Even better, this event ensures spectators can watch golf as it should be watched – with no ropes, walking the course and watching from behind the player.

This experience was shared with viewers from around the globe, reaching some 750 million households in 162 nations.

Yet again it's a testament to the hard work of the ground staff and the tournament organisers.

It's also a striking endorsement of golf in Victoria.

We're rightfully proud of having some of the best courses anywhere in Australia – and the world.

But, as we look to the future, it's just as important that we make sure our game continues to grow.

It's why the ongoing success of the Vic Open is so crucial.

It's why hosting this year's Presidents Cup, together with the Emirates Australian Open in 2020 and 2022, matters so much.

And it's why overcoming the gender divide is pivotal to golf's lasting success.

Because not only is the Vic Open our State Championship. As John Huggan has described, it's a model for the future of our game.

At the Vic Open – and nowhere else – we're seeing men and women take to the same course, at the same time, to compete for the same amount of prizemoney.

It's underpinned by a simple yet powerful idea: the sport we love should be open and accessible to everyone.

It's my hope that this same idea will become more prominent in our game.

I'd like to commend everyone who's had a hand in turning this year's ISPS Handa Vic Open into reality.

The volunteers who made it happen. The sponsors who continue to back this event.

The players who gave us an outstanding four days of golf in, at times, trying conditions. And, of course, every golf tragic who showed their support.

See you next year.

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier

MIRACLE AT 13TH BEACH

Frenchwoman Celine Boutier and Scotsman David Law are the 2019 ISPS Handa Vic Open champions but that's only half the story of a tournament which has garnered world attention. And after passing its biggest test MARK HARDING says it has an even stronger future.

Auld alliance ... France and Scotland are celebrating together with Celine Boutier and David Law claiming the Vic Open trophies.





Steely concentration was a feature of Celine Boutier's victory.

In the first two rounds of the 2019 ISPS Handa Vic Open, 312 golfers teed it up on the Bellarine Peninsula. That's exactly twice as many players and caddies as the biggest events like the US Open or British Open accept on courses with clubhouses twice the size as 13th Beach.

When you think about the challenges, it's nothing short of a miracle that this tournament succeeds. And not just succeeds but continues to grow – setting trends, sending messages, changing culture and making an important contribution to the game.

For much of its first six years at 13th Beach, the Vic Open had been lauded here but considered more of a novelty abroad. But each time it has cut through more and more, until the co-sanctioning breakthroughs of year seven delivered the most important international visitors the tournament has ever seen.

No, not just the players but the tour officials, who have returned home glowing in their praise and enthusiastic for the future.

"We were always a bit nervous with the two tours coming in as to how they would react in terms of the men and the women playing together and the fairways being open for all the fans," said Simon Brookhouse, Golf Australia's General Manager – Golf Operations.

"The feedback from the players has always been positive but until you actually get there and see it for yourself, it is a little daunting because it is so different."

The biggest concerns came from the LPGA security people who were worried about the fairways not being roped from galleries. "But once they actually watched the first round, saw it in action and saw the players were really relaxed about it, the tours all worked in really well to make it a very successful event," said Brookhouse.

The Vic Open is now set for four years of co-sanctioning with the European and LPGA tours. And consider this: of the 312 players this year, more than 130 had never played in it before, so the word of mouth impact can only get greater.

There had been criticism from some influential quarters, like television commentator Kate Burton, that many of the big LPGA stars had missed an opportunity to push the cause of prizemoney equality but Brookhouse said he had no issue with those who didn't turn up because the LPGA co-sanctioning wasn't announced until November and many schedules had already been mapped out.

"The feedback we got from the girls who did play was that they were going to take it upon themselves and talk to all their friends on the LPGA to come over next year. I am very sure that with the word of mouth we will get more players with a higher ranking."

Combined with the highly-credentialed field in the ISPS Handa Women's Australian Open in Adelaide and the originality and excitement of the ISPS Handa World Super 6 in Perth a week later, Australian golf has been able, despite the tyranny of distance, to provide a fabulous fortnight in February.

The Women's Australian Open was able to attract a stronger field and with the momentum built by the Vic Open, more of the topline players may be more inclined to come for two weeks in 2020. Open winner Nelly Korda and sister Jess might even be among them, and wouldn't that be grand?

Korda's victory at The Grange in Adelaide, continuing a unique family Australian Open tradition, was another genuine 'cut-through' story for international media.

And the World Super 6 also deserves, like the Vic Open, to gain greater traction in world golf, featuring a concept that makes the third day, Saturday, every bit as exciting as the last day.

Watching the trials of golfers fighting on different levels for i) the 54-hole lead and a prizemoney bonus, ii) a top-eight position to get a bye in the first round of matchplay, and iii) a top-24 finish to qualify for the Sunday matchplay was entertainment-plus.

The Vic Open also has a Saturday component with a 54-hole cut, which adds something different to the usual 72-hole strokeplay events, where half the field on Sundays are invariably out of contention having failed to make inroads in the third round.

A 54-hole cut at the Vic Open, with only 35 men and 35 women making it through, on a course where the wind invariably gets up late in the day to impact course playability, also means everyone surviving the cut has, at least, a sneaky Sunday chance of winning.

Just ask Sarah Kemp, who started this year's final round in the second group of the day at 7.54am, right on the cut number of one over par. Despite a double-bogey start, the 33-year-old Australian then peeled off nine birdies to shoot 65 before the last group of Kim Kaufman, Celine Boutier and Su Oh had even teed off.

It exceeded all my expectations. The courses were great, the people were amazing, the volunteers, the organisation. Honestly just a really, really, good tournament.

CELINE BOUTIER

It was fantastic. I've never played a golf tournament like this before. It was good to catch up with a lot of girls I grew up playing golf with as well. It was special with the crowd, especially on the weekend. It was a great event.

DAVID LAW



Kim Kaufman provided high drama throughout the Open.

From 11 shots off the pace, Kemp went to lunch just four behind Kaufman and two behind Boutier and Oh. By the time the leaders had played five holes, she was just one shot behind.

Kemp would finish equal second, a wonderful start to her season after last year moving to the LET when she lost her full rights on the LPGA. She followed her Vic Open form with another top-10 finish in the Women's Australian Open, her fortnight guaranteeing her return to the US for the rest of the year.

Also tied for second at 13th Beach were Englishwoman Charlotte Thomas, who will rue the last gruelling hour on Saturday evening when she dropped five shots in her last five holes, and Victorian Su Oh.

Oh dropped four shots in the first four holes on Sunday. She hit just five fairways for the round and couldn't buy a putt (she had 32). To hang in and finish just two shots from victory without her A-game was a tribute to her pluck.

Overnight leader Kaufman had even more trouble with the greens. She had 35 putts on Sunday despite a birdie on the opening hole. Her game unravelled on what should have been the easiest hole on the course – the short, downwind, par-five fifth, where a



Nelly Korda created more world 'cut-through' for Australian golf.

cracking second shot ran up to the pin ... and kept running under a tree at the back. From there, a duffed chip, three putts, a double-bogey seven and confidence shattered.

Kaufman, though, was a welcome visitor and a vocal spruiker of the qualities and equality of the Vic Open, taking to social media to chide some of the bigger names for failing to attend and volunteering to campaign for more to come next year.

She also played the shot of the tournament – slam-dunking her bunker shot for birdie on the par-three seventh hole on Saturday, while others around her were tormented by this little devil of a hole.

A perfect storm was created by the combination of a pin-placement barely three metres from the edge of a cliff on the left of the green, a gale-force wind blowing in that very direction, and the occasional bursts of biting rain.

Just 104 metres from both men's and women's tees, the hole averaged more than 3.5 shots including 16 bogeys, seven double bogeys and six triples or worse by the men, and 21 bogeys, five doubles and five triples or worse by the women.

The hole, and the wind, were the main reasons why Saturday's round took more than five and a half hours.



Sarah Kemp was out early on Sunday and set-up the rest of her year.

Sunny skies on Sunday saw the finals groups negotiate their way in just over four hours, even given the tension. Although if Celine Boutier was tense, there were no outward signs.

The demure Frenchwoman showed barely a flicker of difference after birdie or bogey all week and overcame two early bogeys for a final round even-par 72 and the comfort of a two-putt par on the last for a two-shot win.

The 25-year-old, who has an Australian connection through swing coach Cameron McCormick, came into the Open a proven winner. She is a former world number one amateur, whose wins included the 2015 British Ladies Amateur. She had won twice on the LET and twice on the Symetra Tour.

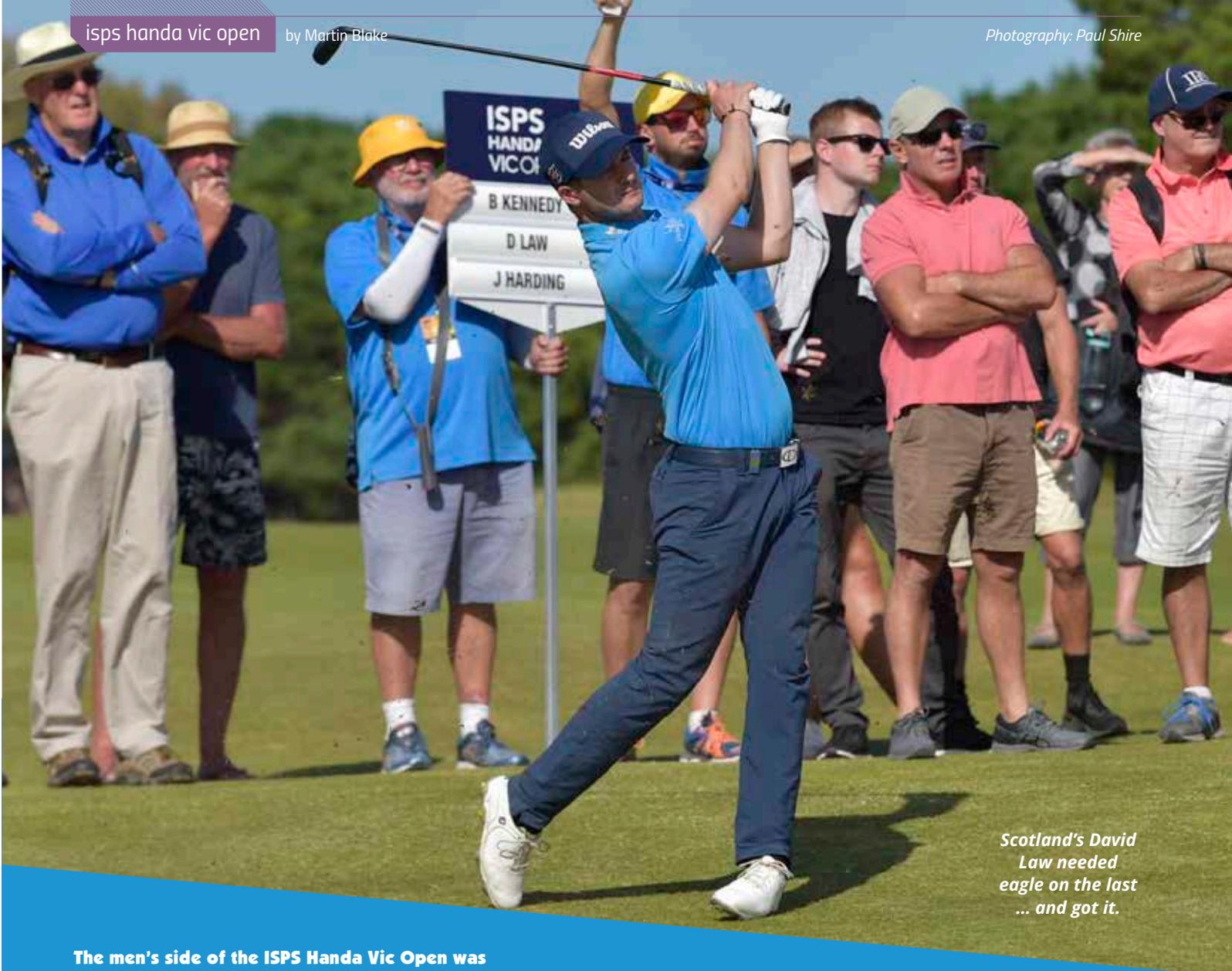
The Open saw her world ranking tumble from 122 to 90 and she followed with another solid weekend at the Women's Australian Open, closing with a five-under 67 and a tie for 22nd.

The Vic Open won't be her last win, which brings to mind the slogan which carried the state Open through many of the turbulent years before its return to prominence.

Breakthrough wins in 2019 for Boutier and Law prove that the Vic Open still is the tournament where stars are born.



The seventh was a devil of a hole. But Katherine Kirk managed to make par from the bunker.



Scotland's David Law needed eagle on the last ... and got it.

The men's side of the ISPS Handa Vic Open was drama-packed from day one to the final hole. MARTIN BLAKE reports on an amazing victory and an event that just gets bigger and better.

LAW'S EAGLE LANDS

The 2019 ISPS Handa Vic Open was billed as the start of a new era for the event, with European and LPGA Tour co-sanctioning for the first time, \$3 million prizemoney split equally between the men and women, and the ABC and Fox Sports mounting the first live broadcast of the modern era.

It was the arrival of the Vic Open as an international event and the progression of what was once a state Open to the big league. What remained was to see if it could match up to the promise. And the reality is that the tournament delivered in every way. It's only getting bigger and better.

The men's Open was first run in 1957 but has rarely been staged with such non-stop drama.

From the diabolical conditions of Saturday and the carnage at the Beach course's little par-three seventh, surely one of the best short par-threes in the world and a masterpiece created by architect Tony Cashmore.

To the mettle shown by Aberdeen's David Law, a previously unheralded Scottish player who hit the best shot of his career at the par-five 18th on the final day, rolled in the eagle putt and turned the men's tournament on its head.

From the unforeseeable and unfortunate meltdown of the men's leader, Wade Ormsby, whose double bogey at the 17th hole on the final day opened the door for Law.

To the almost unthinkable, record-equalling nine-birdie run by New South Welshman James Nitties on the Beach course on the opening day.

Crowds were up every day, especially for the final round when they formed that magnificent amphitheatre around the 18th green for David Law to conjure his little miracle and launched a roar as Law's little putt dropped that the Scotsman, for one, will never forget.



Law upheld... the MyGolf kids provide a guard of honour for the Vic Open men's champion.

The European (and LPGA) Tour players embraced the lack of ropes, a unique feature of this event, and Simon Brookhouse, Golf Australia's General Manager – Golf Operations could only laugh at footage of the English player Andrew 'Beef' Johnston walking the fairway talking to spectators, one of whom was walking a dog.

Male and female players practised together on the course and squeezed in alongside each other on the driving range. On the final day, when a quirk of the draw left two men (Gavin Moynahan and Dale Williamson) and one woman (Manon de Roey), at the end of the field, the tours talked it over and let the three of them play together for a little slice of history.

That's the Vic Open, right there.

It's not the Saudi International, the previous week's European Tour event in the Middle East, where no expense was spared to create a new event. "For us it's not about money, it's about having a good time," said

Brookhouse. "We can't match that. The Saudi Arabia event cost \$65 million to put on and my understanding is there were between \$10 million and \$15 million in appearance fees. We can't do that.

"But if you talk to the players, it's not always about money. If they enjoy the experience, they come back. Talking to the European Tour men and the LPGA Tour women, they loved the area. They enjoyed the independence of living in houses, being able to go and visit things. They get sick of hotels and room service."

The fields could have been better, it's true, given the new co-sanctioning agreements. The highest-ranked player in the men's field was ranked 69th, the Spaniard Adrian Otaegui. But Brookhouse says that drawing a field is about building. "I suspect it (the fields) will get better. I wasn't disappointed at all, to be honest," he said.

"Just to get them on board, both the LPGA and the European Tour, word will spread. We want people spruiking how much fun it

was, get a few more people down there next year and build it. We've been lucky from day one. We probably had better fields than we deserved for the prizemoney we were paying in previous years."

This year's event belonged to David Law, the 27-year-old Scot who had begun the final round three shots back but never really threatened to win until the final throes. Two Australians, 38-year-old Adelaide pro Wade Ormsby and 44-year-old Japanese Tour veteran Brad Kennedy were engaged in a duel throughout the final day, and Ormsby walked to the 17th tee with a one-shot lead in the final group.

All day, the man from Adelaide, son of a South Australian golfing icon and himself a hardened European Tour professional, kept his face emotionless as he picked his way around the Beach course. But at the par-three 17th, he blinked.

A smothered tee shot left him behind the green with a difficult 20-metre pitch uphill to the green and then downhill to the flag.

Wade Ormsby was valiant, leading most of the weekend before just falling short.



His flop shot did not carry far enough, kicked to the right and did not reach the putting surface. Another poor chip and two putts later, he had taken a double bogey five when he could least afford it.

It was his one bad hole on a day when he shot two-under par 70. But it was enough to cost him because up ahead, Law was going down the 18th knowing that he needed eagle to have a chance. To that point, the Scotsman had been playing for a nice top-five finish, in his own words, and he'd called a penalty on himself at the par-four ninth when he accidentally moved his golf ball while preparing to hit from the semi-rough.

Now on the 72nd hole, he went for the jugular. From 195 metres with his second shot, Law reasoned that four-iron would get him to the front of the green. But he wanted eagle. Out came the 21-degree hybrid club and he made sweet contact, hitting over the edge of the swampy wasteland to the left, landing it softly near the front right trap and watching it

track up behind the flag, just less than three metres from the cup.

"If we needed four to win or five to win, I probably would've hit four iron," he said. "But needing three to win, four (iron) was never getting there. Hybrid got it the whole way back. It was the right shot at the right time."

Law made the putt in the left edge of the hole that drew what might have been the biggest roar in Vic Open history. "Under that pressure and under that situation, needing to pull it off, it's something I'm so proud of," he said.

But it was not over yet. Ormsby was coming down the 18th, needing eagle for a playoff, and his fairway wood went like an arrow at the green, stopping in the back fringe, leaving him an eight-metre putt. Once that putt slid under the cup, the 27-year-old Law knew that he had won for the first time on the European Tour, giving him playing rights for this year and the next, not to mention a healthy pay cheque.

Ormsby made birdie at the last but finished second with Kennedy, a shot behind the Scot. The home country win he had craved had eluded him. "Disappointed, for sure," he said. "What can I say? Disappointed. Would have been nice to win on home soil."

David Law allowed it all to wash over him as he accepted the trophy alongside Celine Boutier. He had spent five tough years on the Challenge Tour in Europe before finally breaking through and earning his main tour card at the end of 2018.

So solid was his play, with rounds of 67-66-71 66, that it is hard to believe he was ranked 375th in the world before the start. Shooting 31 on the final nine enabled him to climb 167 places and secure his place on Tour for two years

"It'll take a long, long time for this to settle in," he said. "I'm going to enjoy every minute."

A fun week at the beach!

From the pro-ams to the celebrity chef dinner and four days of tournament play, the ISPS Handa Vic Open was one long celebration of golf with loads of family fun.







VIC OPEN BIGGER THAN THE PLAYERS

Sober and silent ... Mike Clayton was the answer to Christina Kim's prayers for a caddy.



Columnist MIKE CLAYTON says the Vic Open doesn't need to compete with richer events because it has the right formula.

From the very beginning seven years ago, the concept of a mixed Victorian Open was rightly seen as a brilliant and innovative idea but it took until this year for it to really attract the attention of the golfing world.

Increasing the prizemoney and introducing the men's European Tour and the LPGA was the necessary fillip it needed and whilst far from perfect, it showed the way forward and already it was being talked about as the best tournament in the country.

Of course, the national men's and women's Opens will always be most countries' most significant titles but there are lessons to be learned from what's happening at 13th Beach.

Big Australian tournaments have always relied on the payment of one or more big-name stars to attract sponsors, television interest and legitimacy.

Tony Charlton used the 'one star' formula from 1977 when he brought Johnny Miller, the hottest golfer in the world at the time, to the Vic Open and it worked brilliantly until 1983. Having Greg Norman, David Graham, Graham Marsh and Bob Shearer as the supporting cast to Miller, Gary

"IF I CAN'T GET FIVE OR SIX OF THE TOP 20 PLAYERS DOWN HERE NEXT YEAR, I HAVEN'T DONE MY JOB."

Player, Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, Ben Crenshaw and Curtis Strange didn't exactly hurt Charlton's cause either.

The world has long moved on from those exciting days. We can watch the best players every week on television. The European Tour has gone from a six-month schedule restricted by the weather to a twelve-month world tour. The prizemoney in the United States has reached levels unimaginable to those who played decades ago and fewer Americans find the need to extend their golfing experiences beyond their own shores.

When they do, the appearance fees are beyond silly. And why would you play in Australia when Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are handing out seemingly unlimited amounts of cash for their early season events?

The Vic Open is never going to attract four of the five leading players in the world as Saudi Arabia did the previous week, but its format means it doesn't need to.

Spectators walking the fairways (some even with well-behaved dogs), enabling them to watch golf 'from behind' as it should be watched, is just one element making the event bigger than the players playing it. Obviously the mixed format is the most important element but the support of a region delighted in seeing professional golf cannot be underestimated.

Would it be so successful in Melbourne without a huge name to attract the marginal spectator? Is it better to eschew the payment of fees, increase the prizemoney over time and rely on the players to come to an event with an increasing reputation for good fun, great atmosphere and played on one of the best courses either the European Tour or the LPGA see all season?

I caddied for Christina Kim and she said at the end of the week, "If I can't get five or six of the top 20 players down here next year, I haven't done my job."

Kim is a throwback to the days of Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus and Peter Thomson

when the caddy's job was to turn up sober, know the rules and keep well away from the handing out of gratuitous advice.

She makes all her own decisions "because I know my game better than anybody and only I know how I want to hit a shot."

Increasingly in the era post-Nicklaus and Thomson, players and caddies have evolved – or devolved – to a point where seemingly everything is a discussion and a joint decision. There are some great caddies out there with good instincts as to the right club and the right shot and there is nothing wrong with the modern way. But it's a revelation to see a totally self-reliant player making all her own choices and I wonder if it isn't a better way to play.

Thomson, in his wonderful book *A Life in Golf*, said, "Occasionally I'd say to Jackie (Jackie Leigh, his English caddy), 'I think I'll hit a four iron here, Jackie,' and he'd just say 'good.'"

Thomson was always amazed that Sam Snead would ask his caddy what club to use – and then if it was wrong, he'd blame the caddy. "He was the best player in the world and here he was asking a caddy what to do. I couldn't believe my eyes," Thomson told me many years ago.

Mind you, there was one time Christina could have done with a little guidance.

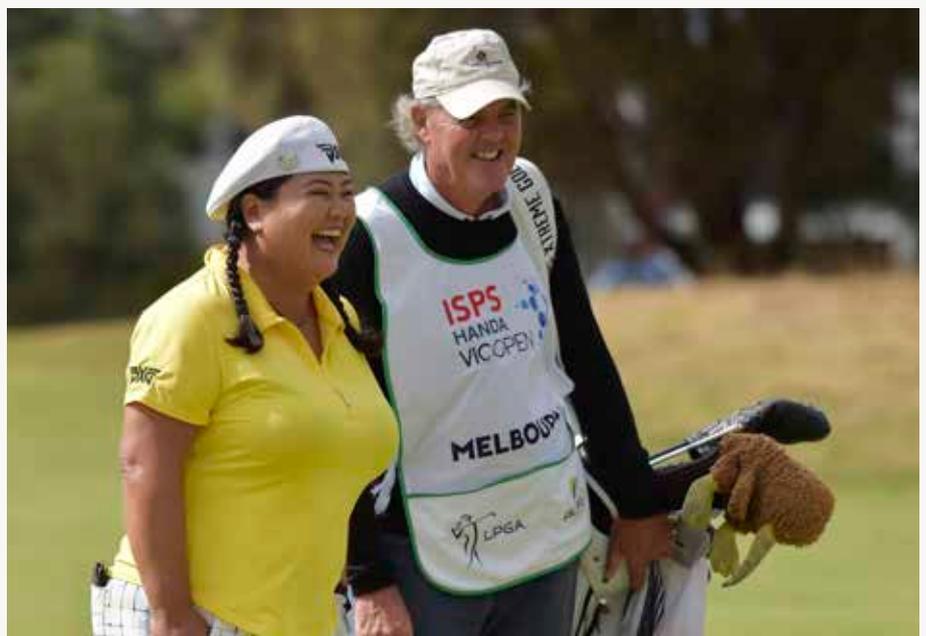
In the practice round we had determined the right line off the eighth hole was just left of a Norfolk Island pine far in the distance.

On Saturday the wind had switched and she decided she would go to the right of the tree. I thought it a somewhat surprising decision but kept my mouth shut and her beautiful drive finished 15 yards into the junk on the right.

As we walked around the corner of the dogleg and it became apparent her ball was in the rocky wasteland, she said, "Oh no, I've got this hole mixed up with the 14th!"

Then the next morning she inexplicably swapped her driver for a three-wood off the first tee. Cresting the hill and seeing her ball 40 yards behind her playing partners and 170 yards from the pin, it was "I've done it again – I've got this mixed up with the (much shorter) 10th!"

Hopefully next year she will have it sorted and she can convince more of the better players to head to Barwon Heads and what is one of the most interesting tournaments in the game, and one sure to only get even better.





BRIONY KEEPS ON

#DOINGITFORJARROD



Briony Lyle in the Challenge marquee at the ISPS Handa Vic Open

The spirit of Jarrod Lyle is still keenly felt at Australian golf tournaments as Challenge, the charity supporting kids with cancer, works to raise money and awareness in his memory. Guest columnist BRIONY LYLE writes about the importance of continuing husband Jarrod's legacy.

2018 was certainly a year of extreme highs and lows for our family. We celebrated some huge milestones, like Lusi's first day of school, in amongst some days that I never want to think about again.

Jarrod's ongoing health battle was all-consuming for most of the year, followed by an overwhelming outpouring of support that almost seemed to gain momentum as it evolved. To see all the footage of the professional players across the world wearing yellow and sporting Leuk pins was amazing. Yet even more incredible were the images coming from so many golf courses around Australia, full of smiling amateur and social golfers proudly wearing yellow in honour of Jarrod.

I could be wrong, but that amount of support on such a huge scale at a grassroots level is unprecedented in

the golf community in this country and it serves to remind me on a daily basis that things have quickly become so much bigger than Jarrod.

The annual Australian summer of golf has always been a busy time for us but the events at the end of last year were absolute chaos – in a good way. To know how much work went into creating the Lyle Mile concept across all three events at the end of 2018 was astounding and the sea of yellow on Thursday at the PGA Championship and again at the 2019 Vic Open were incredible to behold.



Briony has become a tireless charity worker in Jarrod's memory. Photo: Paul Lakatos

Through his cancer journey, Jarrod was able to use his public profile to help raise awareness and generate funds to help continue the work of Challenge – an organisation and a cause that he was incredibly passionate about. Now, obviously, he can no longer continue that work.

Since Jarrod's death in August, we have received thousands of messages of support, offers of help, financial donations, and orders for Leuk the Duck merchandise from people all around the world. To say that we were not prepared is an understatement. I don't think anybody could have anticipated the incredible number of orders that have been received since August, and that continue to this day.

A humble range of products that had existed for years and managed to raise a few dollars for Challenge in golf circles literally exploded onto the world stage and became a symbol of cancer, golf, Jarrod, and so many other things. Jarrod and I had spoken many times over the past few years about ways in which we could do more for Challenge, and sometimes I joke about the lengths he has gone to, to make it happen. But that's just my black humour, which helps get me through the day.

It was a Victorian schoolgirl and up-and-coming golfer Keeley Marx who first used #doingitforjarrod on social media. I didn't even know it existed for quite a few weeks until it was brought to my attention. For

some reason, the sentiment behind those four simple words really resonated with me and easily summarised all the incredible things that were happening in Jarrod's name around the world. As you can now see on social media, it has taken on a life of its own and it's incredible to watch.

I WANT TO USE HIS STORY AND OUR SHARED EXPERIENCES TO TRY TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THERE ARE PARENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD WHO ARE HAVING TO MAKE THE UNTHINKABLE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR OWN CHILDREN THAT WE HAD TO MAKE ABOUT JARROD.

Whether the cameras are rolling or not, every single time any of us decides to wear yellow on the golf course, or proudly display our Leuk products, there's a very good chance that decision has been inspired in some way by memories of Jarrod. Such simple little things on their own ... but when all of those single actions are put together, they speak volumes for the incredible legacy that he has created.

It's this legacy that now drives me, and I'm hell-bent on ensuring that Jarrod's journey does not die with him. Hopefully it doesn't look to the outside world like I'm trying to take advantage of Jarrod's death, although I'll put my hand up to admit that I AM trying to leverage off the situation. But not for personal gain.

I say this because I want to use his story and our shared experiences to try to draw attention to the fact that there are parents around the country and around the world who are having to make the unthinkable decisions about their own children that we had to make about Jarrod.

Parents are having to choose a horrific course of treatment for their sick child in the hopes that it will eventually make them better. Parents are also meeting with palliative care teams when treatment options have been exhausted. Time and time again throughout Jarrod's journey, he and I would acknowledge the fact that he was able to participate fully in every step of the process and he could voice his

concerns, ask questions, give feedback and be actively involved in every decision and every discussion.

The thought that there would be so many parents who would be making those same decisions on behalf of their infant/toddler/child/teenager was a scenario that upset the two of us on many occasions. It's something that should never happen, but we all know that it does.

I now know that there's something I can do for those parents – I can continue #doingitforjarrod by working even harder alongside Challenge to ensure the Leuk brand reaches new heights. The true value behind every single sale we make is so much more than a dollar value or a number on a page.

If Jarrod's story inspires you to make a donation to Challenge, that's brilliant. If his story inspires you to purchase Leuk the Duck merchandise for yourself or those around you, that's also incredible. The proceeds from those sales will all make their way back to Challenge, to ensure Jarrod's legacy of giving back to children and families living with cancer will continue.

But even more than that, if Jarrod's story reminds you that someone you know or someone in your community is facing a similar battle and you are inspired to reach out to them and offer a helping hand in even the tiniest of ways, to me

that is even more precious. It would obviously be a great thing if Challenge could reach every child and their family who received a cancer diagnosis throughout Australia, but it's just not possible. Yet by sharing Jarrod's story and reminding everyone that he, and we, are not the only ones to go through this horror, perhaps we can have even a tiny positive impact on the lives of people we'd otherwise not be able to reach.

If nothing else, my own experience has taught me that there are so many things far more valuable than money – a shoulder to cry on, a home-cooked meal, a few hours reprieve from children, a clean

house, a tidy garden, a box of chocolate, an uninterrupted sleep. None of these things are expensive and yet they can be the difference between getting through the day or falling in a miserable heap.

So, if you are reading this, and you know a family who are going through their own cancer battle, please take a few minutes and offer them some help. Even if they say they are fine, there's always something you can do. To me, this simple concept is at the heart of #doingitforjarrod. It's nothing big or flashy but it's significant enough to keep that person or that family afloat just a little while longer.

WAYS TO KEEP DOING IT FOR JARROD

Very soon we'll be announcing a brand new initiative, Jarrod's Gift, that will be the culmination of discussions between the PGA of Australia, Golf Australia and Challenge. Golf clubs around the country will be able to take part in a nationwide fundraising effort. Stay tuned for more exciting updates very soon.

Also, the release of Jarrod's autobiography is scheduled for August 2019 and will coincide with #doingitforjarrod month, supported by Golf Australia .

Readers wishing to purchase Leuk the Duck merchandise can go to:
www.challenge.org.au/shop

For more information on Challenge, Supporting Kids With Cancer, go to:
www.challenge.org.au





Australian Amateur champions Amy Hong and Conor Purcell on their way to victory.

TEARS & CHEERS AT AUS-AM

The two overseas winners at the Australian Amateur both provided a memorable moment to secure the title. MARTIN BLAKE reports on a tense and emotional final day.



Fist pumping was the order of the day for Irishman Conor Purcell and South Korean Amy Hong after their Australian Amateur victories at Woodlands.

Conor Purcell raised his arms in the air in triumph as he walked back down the first hole at Woodlands after his 37th-hole triumph in the Australian Amateur Championship. Surrounded by Irish supporters about to mark the 21-year-old's biggest win, Purcell savoured the moment.

"Get me a whiskey," he said, and no one could have denied him a tippie.

It had been a long day at Woodlands, notably for Purcell and Sydney's Nathan Barbieri, the men's finalists, but also for Yae-Eun (Amy) Hong, the 16-year-old South Korean who had conjured a remarkable chip-in to win the women's final at the 34th hole almost an hour earlier.

Hong's father Tae-Sik, a former professional player himself and her caddie for the week, had convinced her to punch her chip into the bank behind the 16th green so that the ball's momentum was stunned, allowing it to trickle up on to the green. It was a masterstroke in every way.

Back at the clubhouse, Barbieri, a polite young man who had fought so doggedly to prolong the agony of the men's final,

shed tears as he talked his way through his incredibly near miss in the national championship.

All the emotions were on display on a day of sensational amateur golf with an international flavour. Yet perhaps the biggest story of the week came on the first day of matchplay when the top-ranked Australian man, Victoria's David Micheluzzi, lost to the 64th seeded Harrison Crowe, having utterly dominated the strokeplay section with rounds of 63 at Spring Valley and 64 at Woodlands.

The quick departure of the world's number-eight ranked amateur player blew the men's section of the Australian Amateur wide open.

Purcell, a Dubliner who came to Melbourne for the championships out of desperation for some golf in the midst of an Irish winter, won the men's final when the 21-year-old Barbieri, from the north-west Sydney suburb of Ryde and playing out of Monash Golf Club, made his fatal, final error.

Their match had ebbed and flowed all afternoon on the tight fairways and quirky, little greens of Woodlands but Purcell looked to dominate when he went four-up through 26 holes. Then the match turned; the Irishman had a birdie putt to go five-up at the 27th hole, the par-four ninth on the course, but promptly three-whacked it and gifted the NSW player the hole.

By the time they reached the par-three 17th tee for the 35th hole of the final, Barbieri had clawed back to two-down, but he was at breaking point. Still he chose to fight. With his family in the crowd having driven the 10 hours from Sydney overnight, he hit a beautiful iron shot that narrowly cleared the front trap and came to rest just more than a metre from the stick.

A birdie, a fist pump (not to mention a guttural roar from his father and self-confessed "hacker" Ernie, who had introduced Barbieri to the game at the age of 13), and he was only one-down with one to play. Then at the par-five 18th, after a murdered drive by Barbieri, a wobbly Purcell flared his tee shot wide right and into deep rough.

Pondering a potential disastrous defeat from an apparently unassailable position an hour earlier, the Irishman pulled a hybrid club from his bag and tried to hack it up towards the green. Watching this fateful club selection from the fairway, a seasoned professional muttered: "That's got 'smother' written all over it."

The shot veered hard left and up on to the driveway beside the clubhouse, in bounds but leaving him no way of stopping his wedge shot on the green.

Purcell said later he was mindful of Barbieri's position, centre-fairway and in range of the green for two. "I was thinking of where he was and he had a strong chance of making four," he said. "For me to lay up I'd have needed an eight iron or even a wedge, so thought I'd have a chop at it and it might get up near the green. But it didn't work." Ultimately, he conceded the hole to Barbieri and it was all square and headed to extra holes.

Across they marched to the first tee, and here it was Barbieri who faltered. With the pin cut left on the right-to-left dogleg par-four and deep bunkers guarding the left, the prudent play was to aim for the centre of the green and let the southerly breeze drift the ball in toward the flag. Certainly that is what Purcell did, avoiding the dreaded short-side.

But Barbieri had gone at that tricky pin in regulation play a few hours earlier, making birdie. He gambled again, and lost. His gap wedge from 120 metres drifted left, cleared the traps but wound up on a steep embankment, left and long. "I wanted to let it ride the wind,

but I started it further left than I wanted, and the wind just took it," he said later.

From there, he could only make bogey, his par-saver putt drifting right of the hole, and Purcell calmly lagged his birdie putt up close, conceded a par for the win. "After I saw Nathan pull it left, the centre of the green was where I needed to go," he said. "When he hit his chip, I thought: 'Make four, make him hole it!'"

Purcell is the first-ever Irishman to win the Australian Amateur. His only previous victory was the South of Ireland title in 2016 but it will unlikely be his last. With his brother Gary on the bag, he was formidable all week at Spring Valley and Woodlands (which incidentally were preened and magnificent for the occasion).

For the largely unheralded Barbieri, it was a watershed week regardless of the result and while the waterworks flowed afterward, he was able to find some perspective. It was by far the best-ever result for the boy who learned his golf at Ryde-Parramatta Golf Club and then North Ryde Golf Club, where he still works in the pro shop.

"It's been unbelievable," he said. "I'm disappointed but I played my heart out this week," he said. "I've definitely shown myself that I can compete with anyone."

The women's final was an all-international affair after the last-standing Australian, Stephanie Bunque, was knocked out in the semi-finals.

The Japanese 15-year-old Tsubasa Kajitani was the surprise packet with her long tee balls generated from a superbly rhythmic swing. But she was overwhelmed in

the end by 16-year-old Hong, another graduate of the quite incredible Korean talent factory for women out of Seoul.

Hong led for most of the match and went three-up through 33 holes with a beautiful wedge in tight at the par-five 15th followed by a drilled birdie putt, while Kajitani, who had actually hit it closer, missed her chance.

Then at the 16th, after Hong's short iron from the rough skated off the back of the green and into the rough, leaving her with a steep bank to negotiate and no room between the fringe and the cup, the moment of the women's final arrived.

The Korean felt she was in trouble. "I just thought 'bogey is okay,'" she said. "It was so hard, and it was my first time playing on these tough greens."

Hong decided to trust her father's notion of a hard chip into the bank, taking the momentum away from the ball. She executed it perfectly. "I just played it and I thought it was very big, but it just went in the hole."

Kajitani was on the green with a long birdie putt to come but that was the match, then and there. Hong won 4&3 for her first national title. Her father Tae-Sik, who said he regretted giving the professional game away at 20 to study in America, burst into tears.

It was that kind of day at Woodlands.

FOOTNOTE: Amy Hong would go on to win the trophy for leading amateur in the Vic Open with scores of 68, 72, 79. Despite missing the final cut, no other amateur could match her two-over total after three rounds.

Runners-up Nathan Barbieri and Tsubasa Kajitani in action during the final.



MARYSVILLE...

The Black Saturday bushfires of 2009 devastated Victoria at the cost of 180 lives. One of the hardest hit communities was the beautiful township of Marysville, where 10 years of heartbreak, grieving and recovery is told through the microcosm of the local golf club.

A special report by CHARLES HAPPELL.



The Marysville community gathered at the golf course to leave a message to supporters from around the nation. Photo courtesy: Marysville Community Golf & Bowls Club

Bob Emblin played golf on the morning of the most devastating and deadly bushfires to ever hit Victoria – Saturday February 7, 2009, the day we have all come to know as Black Saturday.

A life member at the Marysville Community Golf and Bowls Club, which would soon find itself at the epicentre of the inferno, Emblin wasn't going to be put off by the searing heat and blustery north winds. He'd played in worse conditions than that before. And besides, it was monthly medal day.

So, aged 74, he headed off to the first tee in his golf cart and discovered that

one of his playing partners that day was a promising club junior, 13-year-old Matthew Liesfield, whose family had moved to Marysville from nearby Buxton just a week earlier.

Emblin remembers telling the boy: 'C'mon, jump in the cart and ride with me; it's too hot to be walking.'

As the morning wore on and the temperature rose, Emblin got to talking to Matthew about school and his plans for the future. "I remember asking if he'd enjoyed his holidays and whether he was looking forward to going back to school,

which was due to start back the following week," he recalls.

"Matthew said, 'yep, I've only got four years to go and I'll be finished school and then I want to go to university'. He was such a terrific young fellow. So full of promise"

After the round, a par event, Emblin bought the youngster a soft drink and they waited around as the final groups finished and the results came in and, lo and behold, no-one was able to better Matthew's score of 5-up, so he became the club's newest, and possibly youngest, monthly medal winner.

UNBROKEN

Yet, as they sat in the clubhouse, the heat became even more fierce and the weather even more menacing, so Emblin suggested they all go home and get themselves inside and out of harm's way.

"And that's the last I saw of him. He and his older brother James and their mother perished inside their house later that night," says Emblin quietly, still greatly affected by the horror that visited their community 10 years ago.

The heartbreaking story is one of many such tales you'll find in Kinglake, Marysville, Strathewen, St Andrews, Beechworth, Bendigo and Gippsland – of friends and family members, helpless, being engulfed by the flames which tore across the Victorian countryside that day.

The fires, fanned by a howling north-westerly and then a cool change, resulted in Australia's highest ever loss of life from a bushfire, with 173 direct fatalities, a figure that later increased to 180 after seven people died from their injuries. Hundreds more were injured, thousands left homeless.

Eventually 34 fatalities were confirmed in the Marysville area, with all but 14 of over 400 buildings in the township destroyed.

The golf course and maintenance sheds were destroyed, including pumps, tractors, mowers, golf carts and equipment and signage, as were the six

bridges crossing the Steavenson River which snakes through the layout.

Somehow the clubhouse survived and it was transformed into a local hub for the Marysville community. The town itself was declared a crime scene, closed to all access for a number of weeks following the fires, but the clubhouse was situated right on the edge of the exclusion zone and became a focal point for gatherings, briefings, even funerals, and the distribution of information.

Computers were set up inside the building and counsellors worked from there, dealing with those locals who'd been traumatised by the blaze. They had no shortage of work.

When the course was finally re-opened, five-time British Open champion Peter Thomson turned up to join 63 other golfers for a Saturday morning competition and hit the ceremonial first tee shot.

Thomson said he was delighted to be involved in the special day and humbled by the spirit of the Marysville community.

"I am part of the grand fraternity of the 30 million golfers in the world who, when we hear of some club that has some trouble, all pack up and come around to see if we can help," Thomson said. "So that's why I'm here today."

Like Emblin, Liz Amos is a life member at Marysville. She was one of many

who worked tirelessly after the fires to get the club back into a playable state and later wrote a book about the catastrophe which includes dramatic before and after photographs.

"The clubhouse was made of these cement blocks and somehow it survived the fire – it was one of the few things left standing," Amos said. "All the holes were damaged in some way.

"I used to think that if you ran down to the river and sat in the water, you'd be safe from any fire but having seen the damage afterwards, I don't think that's the case. All the undergrowth right down to the edge of the water was burnt. I think you'd have died of smoke inhalation."

Interestingly, that's where Emblin himself sheltered – in the Steavenson River under a bridge, fully dressed – after he'd packed his wife off in her car and told her to get the hell out of the place. He then went to his car but was shocked to discover his keys missing. With the fire bearing down on him, he sprinted to the river and jumped in, waiting, submerged, till the worst of the inferno passed.

Matthew Liesfield's winning scorecard from that day is now kept in the Marysville clubhouse and a Liesfield Trophy is held each year in honour of him and his 14-year-old brother James.



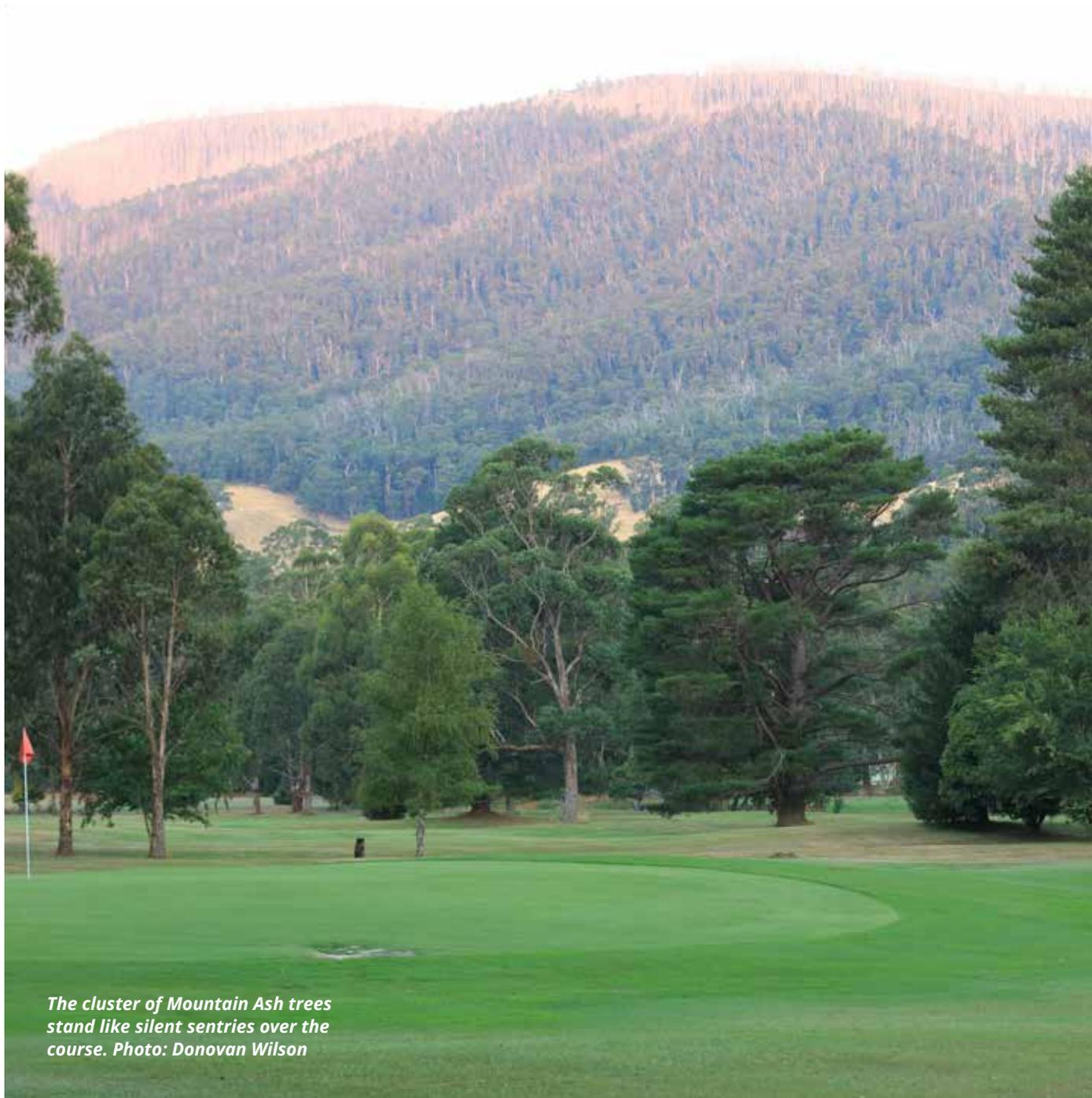
2009

Photo courtesy: Marysville Community Golf & Bowls Club



2019

From left, Geoff Ferguson, Kellan Fiske, Ron Jones, Lesley Rundle and Bob Emblin on one of the six bridges rebuilt after the Black Saturday bushfires. Photo: Donovan Wilson



The cluster of Mountain Ash trees stand like silent sentries over the course. Photo: Donovan Wilson

Behind the 18th tee, a memorial garden has been planted for those Marysville members who lost their lives on February 7 – two golfers and three lawn bowlers – and that number includes 15-year-old Dalton Fiske, the brother of Marysville’s greenkeeper, Kellan.

For Kellan, the 10th anniversary of Black Saturday is a time only for solemn reflection. He lost both his brother and mother Elizabeth in the fires.

He was a 20-year-old apprentice greenkeeper at Marysville at the time but wasn’t working at the course on that Saturday – instead, as a volunteer

CFA firefighter, he was on the back of a firetruck trying to keep the community safe. His dad Glen, a CFA captain, was also out fighting the fires when the family home was destroyed.

“I have thought about the anniversary a little bit but for those of us affected by Black Saturday, we are reminded of it all the time,” he said. “We live it every day – for me, it’s the blackened trees around the course, or finding burnt golf balls around the place.

“The memorial garden behind the 18th tee has a beautiful little plaque and I see that at least twice a week when we mow the tees.”

Fiske credits his job at the golf club as being a key factor in his recovery and enabling him to piece his life back together. He is now 30 and has a partner and says he’s content with his lot.

“The fact I had a job to go to after the fires was so important,” he said. “That, and the support I received from the members and the club received from the golf industry, including the greenkeepers’ association, was what helped me get on with my life.”

From the highest point on the course, around the 12th green and 13th tee, you can get a wonderful view out to Cathedral Ridge and it is here that the

reminders of Black Saturday are most vivid: a cluster of Mountain Ash trees, burnt a greyish-white colour and devoid of any vegetation, standing like silent sentries over the course.

Amos said while the black wattle trees had regenerated very quickly, the Mountain Ash never recovered. "From the course, you can see them sticking up in the distance, almost like a crew-cut," she said.

She said the course is looking an absolute treat at the moment, which is a credit to the young superintendent and his band of volunteers: "It is in better condition now than it has been in the 25 years that I've been a member."

Golf has also been something of a saviour for Emblin, who still plays regularly at the age of 84. The rest of the time, he can be found on a mower or tractor helping Fiske and tending to the course.

"I volunteer three or four days a week, cutting the fairways and greens, and doing whatever else is needed," he said. "I've been volunteering for 17 years because I just love the club and its members, and I want to see Marysville get back to what it was – a thriving, successful country golf club."

Marysville residents marked the 10th anniversary of Black Saturday with a church ceremony at 6pm on February 7 – the time and date in 2009 that the blaze roared across from Narbethong and arrived on the town's doorstep.

After the service at Christ Church, one of the many buildings which had to

be reconstructed after the fires, the congregation walked down to the Black Saturday memorial at Gallipoli Park. A single church bell rang for a minute in tribute.

Five days earlier, on the Saturday, the Marysville Community Golf and Bowls Club commemorated the anniversary, and the five golf and lawn bowls members who lost their lives, by holding the annual Liesfield Trophy. Behind the 18th tee, where the memorial garden and plaque are situated, a quiet ceremony was held to honour the victims.

Lesley Rundle, the ladies' captain at Marysville, said the 10th anniversary was as much about remembrance as it was about thanking those hundreds of volunteers – individuals and organisations – who helped rebuild the town and golf club.

And the thank-you list is a long one: helpers, donors, workers, suppliers and volunteers of every hue who came out in droves in the weeks and months after the fires to rebuild the community.

BlueScope donated the steel used to rebuild the six bridges that cross the Steavenson River. Sand was supplied by builders for new bunkers, clubs and balls were donated by golfers around Victoria, and greenkeepers came from all over to help re-turf 17 of the 20 greens that were killed off.

The dead grass and topsoil were removed and replaced with a new layer of sand, instant turf (paid for by the Marysville Lions Club) was rolled out and it was all top-dressed by hand.



The Liesfield Trophy played annually in memory of Matthew and James.

The greenkeepers also planted trees along the river near the bowls club, which helped stop soil erosion from the winter rains.

The pump shed was burned down so a group of local plumbers, with the help of Goulburn Water, repaired the irrigation system that brought water up from the Steavenson. Arborists, and a couple of locals who worked in the logging industry, helped clear the most dangerous of the damaged trees.



Marysville course superintendent Kellan Fiske carries the reminder of the Black Saturday tragedy every day.

Photo: Donovan Wilson

Rob Christie, the former course superintendent and life member of the club, played a crucial role in coordinating the recovery and kept the place going in the year after the fires. Nine holes were re-opened for play in May and the final nine later in the year, once the bridges were repaired.

It was an extraordinary community effort that lives on today through superintendent Kellan Fiske and his trusty band of five or six volunteers who help keep the course in pristine condition.

Steve Coker was not a member of the club at the time of Black Saturday, although he and his wife, as part-time residents, lost their home in the fires.

After Black Saturday, Coker became responsible for the bushfire clean-up across the state as an Executive Project Manager with Grocon.

He joined the club later in 2009, began playing regularly and is now the club president.

Coker said there was a huge voluntary response from individuals, organisations, businesses and clubs from all over Australia in the initial clean-up.

Over time a plan was created to refurbish the clubhouse facility – golf shop, members lounge and deck area, commercial kitchen, function room/restaurant space, bowls office, golf office and bar facilities.

Said Coker: "The club members now enjoy the benefits of this sustained recovery over 10 years; it is maintained by Kellan Fiske and a dedicated team of volunteers who have a passion to present the course and gardens to a high standard each week. Long time members, visitors and the community are very complimentary about the standard of presentation."

Before Black Saturday the club had about 150 members. "A lot of members moved from the area after the fires and said: 'enough's enough'. There were probably too many bad memories, too," said Bob Emblin.

But the club has built back up to 120 active members and runs two competitions each week.

Ten years after the day which devastated the community, the hard work has begun to pay off. It's there for all to see in the lush fairways, verdant surrounds and smooth-rolling greens. So much so that members are almost unanimous in their view: the course has never looked better.

MARYSVILLE COMMUNITY GOLF & BOWLS CLUB

You can support Marysville by visiting the town and the many tourist attractions in the region. The Marysville Community Golf & Bowls Club welcomes green fee players seven days a week and offers an 18-hole course set in a natural amphitheatre surrounded by picturesque hills.

Nestled in a fertile valley of the Great Dividing Range, the course has been designed to embrace the countryside and the Steavenson River which meanders through it.

You can book online or contact the club on (03) 5963 3241 or email enquiries@marysvillegolfandbowls.com.au

The Golf Shop is open weekends or other days by prearrangement.

GREEN FEES

\$30.00 weekends or public holidays (\$25 for 9 holes). \$25.00 midweek (\$20 for 9 holes).

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Donna Howard's life has been turned around with the help of service dog Ebony.



Donna's Dogged Fightback

Almost 20 years in the Australian Defence Force left Donna Howard suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But golf and a black Labrador called Ebony have helped her fight back. She spoke to JANELLE WARD.

Golf can exhilarate, frustrate and ... heal.

But for Donna Howard, the 'healing' required one vital addition – a dog trained to walk every step of the way with her on course.

That Labrador, Ebony, is essentially giving Donna her life back, her family the wife and mother they once knew and Koorungal Golf Club in Altona a very handy pennant player and loved member.

A black dog was the key to fighting *the* black dog.

Donna was an aviation technician in the navy for 19 and a half years, serving on HMAS Nirimba and HMAS Sydney in Nowra and Canberra and at RAAF Williams in Point Cook. She injured her neck in an accident she still prefers not to talk about and her navy career was over.

She pushed on, however, working with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) for close to six years until she was medically retired as Totally and Permanently Incapacitated and with her mental health spiralling downwards.

"The accident left me with chronic neck pain," she explains as we play nine holes at Koorungal – with Ebony, of course. "With that came lots of drinking, lots of depression, lots of anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I was in total denial. Then one Christmas (2009) everything pretty much fell apart. I just couldn't do it anymore."

Fortunately for Donna, husband Glenn and sons Lachlan and Jakob, that low point was also the start of a huge turnaround.

"I spoke to my GP, ended up in a psychiatric hospital, started to take medication and eased off the alcohol. They found me a really good musculoskeletal doctor, Steve Jensen, who turns out to be a member here. He got me on the fentanyl patches, which helped with the neck pain, and I have been working with psychiatrists on and off since then, trying to manage my depression and anxiety and the PTSD – the bad flashbacks and nightmares."

Enter golf and Koorungal.

Donna was only an occasional golfer in her youth but she'd enjoyed the game and hoped it could help her push through the anxiety and get her out of the house – something she still found difficult to do.

She started with the then Golf Victoria Women's Golf Network in June 2012, which led her to Koorungal. Erica Kreymborg, co-ordinator of that program, believes the Women's Golf Network was the ideal program for Donna. "It gave her the opportunity to experience competition-like events as well as meet other women with whom to play golf," she says.

Koorungal vice-president Lyn Foote received a call from Donna in late 2012, detailing her challenges and why she believed a regular hit could be hugely beneficial.

"I played with Donna," says Lyn, "and then found a female member who is the same age (Tracee Grant) and asked her to make sure Donna was on the timesheet and playing with people who were 'user friendly'. Now these two are mates. So I 'picked good!'"

“STRAIGHT AWAY, EBONY WOULD WAKE ME UP FROM NIGHTMARES WITH A BIG LICK ON THE FACE.”

Donna's handicap quickly came down – from 43 to 12 – with help from then Altona Lakes Golf Course professional and now Koorungal assistant pro Jody Hawkins, who adjusted her swing fractionally to ease some of the neck pain.

She was soon playing pennant, but the PTSD was about to rage out of control again.

"Things got worse last year when I tried a treatment called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing, a form of psychotherapy)," says Donna.

"It triggered something and I was having flashbacks and nightmares all the time. On the days I still came to golf, I didn't stay. I didn't come in for lunch because that was just too much for me."

Enter Ebony.

One of the health professionals Donna was seeing suggested she consider an assistance dog. Dogs for the vision-impaired are common, but an assistance dog for someone with PTSD, for a golfer with PTSD?

Consider this: 3000-4000 Australian Defence Force personnel are diagnosed with PTSD each year, according to statistics, and the condition is responsible for more deaths by suicide than fatalities in the line of duty. But research has shown a service dog can make a massive difference.

Donna contacted Integra Service Dogs Australia, which provides dogs for defence force veterans and first responders, such as police, ambulance and fire officers, through partnerships with the likes of Guide Dogs Victoria, the Australian Border Force Detection Dog Program and private registered breeders. A dog is partnered with a handler and learns how to read and respond to that person's emotional state – how and when to offer support.

Within weeks, 18-month-old Ebony, who had not met guide dog pass standards because of "dog distraction" – she had a tendency to interact with other dogs – was at Donna's side.

For the first month after her arrival in August, it was all about bonding at home. "Straight away, Ebony would wake me up from nightmares with a big lick on the face," says Donna.

Then the training began, building obedience skills to the level where reactions to commands and situations were automatic – and working on that dog-distraction problem.

The pair are now inseparable, Ebony in her regulation aqua-coloured jacket, constantly at Donna's feet. Their movement around the golf course is practised and precise – the result of careful and ongoing training.

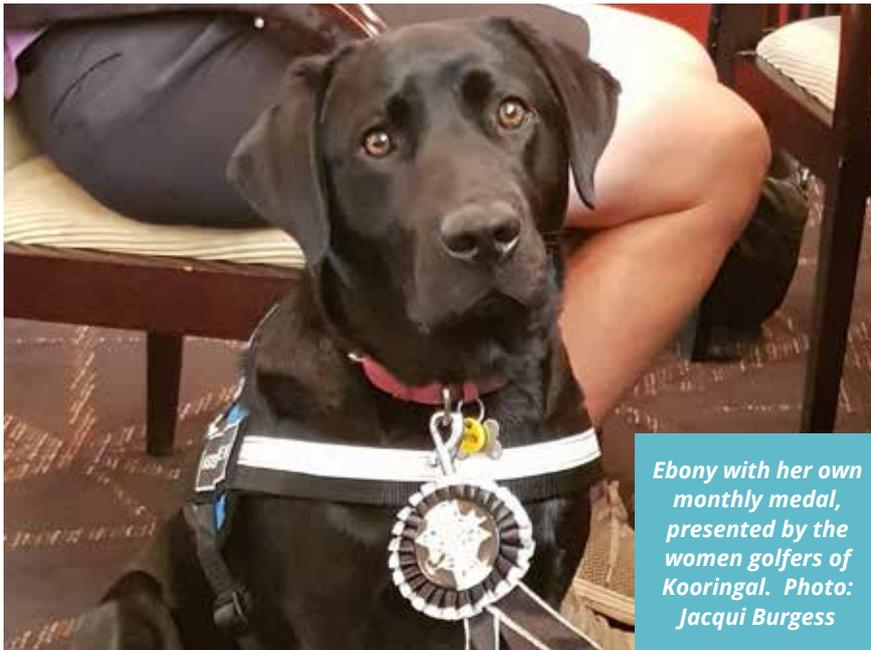
"We had to learn to trust each other," says Donna. "I had to learn that I could put my head down and she would stay."

"We walked the course, just the two of us. She was a bit keen initially to come into the bunkers, so I had to work on that. I also had to be careful on the sixth with all the ducks."

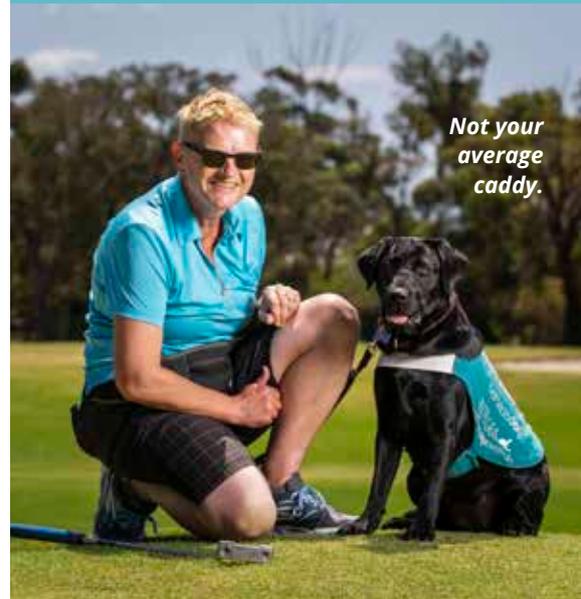
"Then we walked with a group playing to see her reactions and she went well. Then I started playing. All the girls were really helpful, especially Tracee and Kate Arnold, who had always been very supportive."

Ebony walks along quietly as we play, stands and sits where directed and enjoys the odd slice of apple, banana and her favourites – milk bottles and strawberry creams. Water is always handy. There's not a peep out of her, not even a sideways look at a duck.

And a brief demonstration of Ebony's skills back in the clubhouse is astonishing. Donna pretends to be upset and Ebony bounds up



Ebony with her own monthly medal, presented by the women golfers of Kooringal. Photo: Jacqui Burgess



Not your average caddy.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SERVICE DOGS.

DON'T PAT A SERVICE DOG

A service dog is a working dog. You should not pat, feed or distract the dog unless invited. But don't ask.

DON'T IGNORE THE HANDLER

If he/she asks you to step away, or give a similar request, be assured that person knows best and it will be for a good reason.

DON'T ASK WHY SOMEONE HAS A SERVICE DOG

It's just not appropriate.

KEEP YOUR DOG AWAY

Your dog may be keen to socialise with any dog it sees but a working dog must stay focussed.

RIGHT-OF-WAY

A service dog and handler should always have right-of-way. And don't walk alongside the pair unless invited. If you are walking with a service dog and handler, walk on the handler's free side.

IT'S THE LAW

A service dog can go anywhere its handler can go – on public transport, in shops, restaurants and golf courses.

to lick her face; Donna appears agitated and Ebony paws her knees; Donna stands and signals for Ebony to protect her back and then her front and Ebony intuitively lies accordingly. Four key tasks successfully completed. And while Donna talks, Ebony tucks herself under Donna's chair.

But a dog on a golf course, in club rooms? An assistance/service dog is legally allowed to go anywhere its handler can go but how did Kooringal handle Ebony's imminent arrival?

Lyn says there was a board discussion and members were advised. They were then educated about Ebony's role and a dos-and-don'ts article was published in the club newsletter.

"One of the concerns was that some people are afraid of dogs," says Lyn, "but our view was if that was an issue, those people wouldn't put their name down to play with Donna. It was a non-issue."

Kooringal was already conscious of the special needs of some members, with a ramp installed near the steps on the 13th for an amputee.

When Donna won the club's Ida Oatway Trophy (the best three of four stroke rounds over the year) in 2018, she used her acceptance speech to thank the members for their support and to explain more about PTSD.

"I've never hidden any of my struggles," she says. "I've always been open and honest with people and tried to get other people to talk. Two people came up to me later to say they've struggled with mental health issues for years but never told anyone. I say, 'Why are you hiding it?'"

"The more you talk about it, the greater the relief and the more people become aware of it, the less stigma is attached to it. Some of the ladies here didn't know what PTSD was."

"Donna has been open about her struggles," Lyn adds. "In her speech she made the comment that she doesn't expect us to fix anything but if we just listen and hear her, that's all she needs. We were all very moved. It was the best part of the night."

The next step is to alert other clubs that Ebony is part of the team when Kooringal visits for pennant matches.

And pennant with Ebony has required some creative thinking from Donna.

"Johanne Ford will caddy for me and I will have her in a cart. Because pennant is usually played during the warm weather, if it's hot Ebony will go in the cart and I will walk alongside. And sometimes I might need someone to stand with Ebony, like if I'm in a bunker. I can't ask an opponent to do that."

Donna and Ebony have formed a formidable partnership. In January the pair won the monthly medal. Such is the affection in which both are held that when Donna was presented with her medal, the ladies made sure that Ebony had her own medal too.

Now that Ebony has passed the Public Access Test and is no longer in training, Donna plans for them to travel further afield. But the biggest aim is that one day the PTSD nightmares will be consigned to the past.

THE TWINKLERS

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



ABBEY MOULE

AGE: 9

Abbey is a junior member at Victoria Golf Club. Victoria is her favourite course because of all the amazing friends she has made there. She has been playing regularly since she was five years old and has been competing in Golf Australia's Rookie Series. Abbey is a bubbly character who loves meeting new people and travelling to play all different golf courses. Her idol and favourite player is MyGolf Ambassador Minjee Lee. If she isn't playing golf, Abbey likes to read or go for bike rides.

PHOENIX DIAZ

AGE: 9

Phoenix is off an impressive handicap of 13! He loves the challenges golf brings at times and knows the mistakes are going to make him a better golfer. Phoenix is a junior member at Patterson River and has played many golf tournaments in the Rookie Series. He is yet to win a bigger event but cannot wait to hold a trophy up! He loves meeting new people and this has led to him making friends for life. His idol is Tiger Woods because he has worked so hard to get back to the winners' circle.



STARS ON THE RISE

For any sport, nothing is more important than junior development. In golf, the future crystallizes every year at the two biggest junior events in Victoria – the Junior Vic Open at Barwon Heads in December and the Victorian Junior Masters at Spring Valley in January. BRUCE MATTHEWS was at both to profile a cross section of golf's stars on the rise.



Matthew Lever
Victorian Junior Masters Champion



Matchplay mentality became key when teenager Matthew Lever found himself locked in a back-nine battle.

It became apparent that Lever and playing partner Harrison Crowe had the Victorian Junior Masters between them late in the final round at Spring Valley in early January.

The ability for Lever to "stay in the moment" rather than look ahead to the ultimate prize enabled him to eventually savour that winning feeling on the 18th green.

Victory for The National's pennant team member wasn't assured until he blasted from a greenside bunker and holed a one-and-a-half-metre par putt at the last for what would be a three-shot buffer.

Equal atop the leaderboard heading into the back nine, Lever and his Sydney rival remained locked together until the local boy edged ahead with a critical birdie at the par-five 17th.

After Lever's drive split the fairway up the last, Crowe pulled his tee shot into trees to effectively end what had been an engrossing two-man duel.

"It was like matchplay but it's a hard stretch coming in, so anything could have happened. Playing together made it easier because I knew what he was doing, I knew when to be aggressive," the winner said.

"On the 17th, I hit four-iron and nearly holed my second shot. It rolled down into the swale and I two-putted (for birdie) and he three-putted from just off the green.

"I hit off first (up the last). I tried to think where I wanted to hit it, not what I don't want to do. I picked a flag (in front of the distant clubhouse) and hit it straight at that."

The 17-year-old, who leapt into contention with a brilliant five-under 66 in the second round, was the only player to finish under par in the event shortened to 54 holes to after brutal 42-degree temperatures forced the third round to be cancelled.

Local players filled five of the first six places in the boys' event, with Commonwealth's Mitchell Crabbe third, followed by Royal Melbourne's Thomas Hatt, Nathan Page of The National and Commonwealth's Daniel Gill.



Victorian Junior Masters winners
Matthew Lever and Min-A Yoon.

Min-A Yoon
Victorian Junior Masters & Junior Vic Open Champion



Dominant Korean Min-A Yoon might not have quite mastered English yet but she has certainly mastered the courses on the Bellarine Peninsula and Melbourne's sandbelt.

A brilliant summer landed her a stunning treble, winning the Port Phillip Amateur in December ahead of a rare junior double in the 2018 Junior Vic Open a week later and the 2019 Victorian Junior Masters in January.

In the two junior events she never gave the chasers a chance. The 15-year-old's 14-shot winning margin in the weather-shortened Masters after rounds of 69, 68 and 68 eclipsed her 13-shot win in the Open at Barwon Heads a month earlier.

She was a staggering 31-under for seven consecutive competition rounds at 13th Beach, Barwon Heads and Spring Valley either side of the Christmas-New Year period.

Enjoying her second visit to Australia, Yoon speaks little English but identified course management as the key to her victories.

"I didn't play a practice round, just had a look around in the cart, so I tried to focus on strategy and course management, every hole," she said after the win in the Junior Vic Open, which qualified her for another summer engagement in the Vic Open. And while she missed the cut against the LPGA, ALPG and LET players, she's sure to have a long life in the game.

Tom Ryan: An Ace Start



Imagine holing the first shot of a tournament! Cranbourne's Tom Ryan achieved that amazing feat with an ace on the opening hole of the first round of the Victorian Junior Masters in early January.

Starting at Spring Valley's 120-metre, par-three 10th, Ryan's perfect wedge from the elevated tee propelled him to a three-under 68.

"I saw it go in. It bounced about two metres short and went past the pin and then came back with the spin," he said.

Ryan was one of several with a winning chance at one-over heading into the last round, but he faded to finish tied ninth.

"I still thought I was a chance three back. With the (Junior) Vic Open, there were people falling back (late in the final round) and I thought I could hang in there. With three straight birdies to start the back nine, I thought I might be a chance but a couple of unlucky putts stopped the momentum.

"I came into this tournament thinking top-20 would be a great result for me. I can't thank the Cranbourne Golf Club enough for all the training and support."

Ryan, 17, is another promising young player trying to follow the lead of clubmate David Micheluzzi who's now ranked among the world's top 10 amateurs.

"He plays Saturday comp every week. And he runs our pennant training sessions. I've had a couple of games with him," Ryan said.

Caitlyn Campbell-Nyman: Family Tradition



Major champion Michael Campbell inspired many New Zealanders to play golf. Among them – although she moved to Australia when she was one – is his niece.

Caitlyn Campbell-Nyman was prominent on the leaderboard at the Victorian Junior Masters at Spring Valley after a one-under second round before falling back in the final round to finish 12th.

The 16-year-old was smitten with the game as a toddler after a visit to Queensland by her famous uncle for the Australian PGA championship.

"I watched him when I was three or four when he played at Coolum. I just absolutely loved it," she said.

Michael Campbell, who runs a golf academy in Spain, returned to tournament golf to play the 100th New Zealand Open in February and get ready to reboot his career on the world's seniors tours.

"I texted him last year. I was five or six shots off the lead and he gave me some advice on how to keep it going," Caitlyn said.

But Caitlyn, who plays off one at Pacific Golf Club in Brisbane and has applied for Australian citizenship is yet to watch film of Campbell's victory in the 2005 US Open.

"I actually haven't seen it, but I've been told by all my family what happened against Tiger Woods. It sounds pretty epic," she said.

Jasper Stubbs: Junior Vic Open Champion



Amid the flurry of activity preparing for a three-way playoff in a howling southerly and heavy showers, Jasper Stubbs made one critical decision.

He summoned younger sister Piper to pull his buggy for the duel with South Australians Will Arnold and Jack Buchanan up the 18th hole at Barwon Heads that would decide the Junior Vic Open.

The brother-sister duo clinched the title – and a start for Jasper in the Vic Open at neighbouring 13th Beach – when he tapped in for par on the second playoff hole to edge out Arnold after Buchanan was eliminated on the first extra hole.

"We know each other's game fairly well and that's why I asked her," Jasper said of his call-up to Piper.

"The last shot into the last green, she told me rather than go right up to the back (of the green), play it a bit shorter. I had been leaning more towards a full nine-iron.

"I saw Will's go through the back of the green and that indicated that the wind wasn't affecting the shots as much being down in the swale where we were (for approach shots)."

The soft nine settled almost pin-high left, leaving a five-metre putt from the edge of the green that he lagged down and tapped in for the winning par.

Stubbs, captain of the state boys team last year, also overcame the disadvantage of sitting in the clubhouse for more than an hour before being told to get ready for the playoff.

"Last time I checked the leaderboard, I thought I might finish top-five or get a place on the podium. When I came in, everyone had fallen back a bit," he said.

"Because the rain came on the last few holes, I didn't get the chance to go out (to the practice range or putting green). I just tried to stay dry and keep my clubs dry.

"I'd had the best round of the guys in the playoff, so I was fairly confident with how I had finished.

"This was my best finish in a junior tournament and it was nice that it had the Vic Open start with it," the 17-year-old from Huntingdale said.

"I'd wanted to play it (Vic Open) the last couple of years. I've been coming down to watch it at the weekend and to be able to play with those guys is awesome."

Although he missed the cut in the Vic Open, the experience was the highlight of a busy summer that included the Junior Vic Open, the Victorian Junior Masters at Spring Valley, another amateur event in South Australia and the Australian Amateur championships before returning to the Bellarine Peninsula.

Piper was co-leader of the girls' Junior Vic Open after a three-under opening round just 24 hours after stepping off a plane from New

Zealand where she played former world number one Annika Sorenstam's ANNIKA Invitational Australasia at Royal Wellington.

And after Jasper's win and Piper's eighth-place finish, the Stubbs clan was back on a flight together over Christmas when the family flew to Hawaii. "It's a good place to relax and get away from golf for a while. There's a rule: no golf for the week," Jasper said.

Local 13th Beach member Angus O'Brien fired a superb even-par 70 in the strong winds on the final day to finish tied fourth with Nathan Page from The National, only two shots behind the winning total.

Jeneath Wong: In Good Company



Jeneath Wong

It was the best practical golf present that any 14-year-old could wish for on the eve of the Christmas festivities.

Rising star Jeneath Wong had a front-row seat to watch how dominant Korean Min-A Yoon went about the business of streeting the field in the Junior Vic Open.

To play alongside Yoon became the bonus along with the pressure and expectations of being in the last group in the final round at Barwon Heads Golf Club in December.

Wong not only admired but particularly noted how the runaway Korean mastered the difficult southerly wind to shoot a three-under 70 on the way to a whopping 13-shot victory in conditions where an even-par score was remarkable and led to a surge up the leaderboard.

"It was a great honour (being in the last threesome) and experience as well. Her short game is really good. One of the par fives, she was over the back with her third shot and chipped it in for birdie. Wong finished tied fourth after shooting two rounds in the 60s and then in January at the Victorian Junior Masters, finished seventh after two successive even-par 74s.

That included a spectacular start to her final round: an albatross on Spring Valley's par-five first hole, flushing a seven-iron second shot that hit the pin and dropped into the hole.

The pair of top-10 finishes continued her steady advancement for such a talented young player.

A student at St Catherine's girls junior school in Toorak, she played number two in Huntingdale's senior women's team in Division One for most of the last pennant season.

Wong has won a string of junior titles since the family moved to Australia from Malaysia four years ago.

She started hitting balls at three after her father took her to his golf club in Kuala Lumpur for his own practice session.

"My Dad said I had a natural swing, so at the age of five I started playing competitions," she said.

The family lives in an apartment on St Kilda Road, so the nearby Albert Park Driving Range is her regular 'playground', particularly the chipping and putting areas to hone her short game.

Wong, who's also a member at Metropolitan, just can't get enough of this wonderfully addictive sport. "I practise every day after school for about two hours," she said.

And she's easy to spot during a tournament, wearing her distinctive prescription tinted goggles beneath the golf cap.

"I wear normal glasses to school, but at golf they distract you when they fall off your nose," she grinned.

Jack Holland: Round Of His Life



Jack Holland

Royal Melbourne teenager Jack Holland won't be daunted by the surroundings if he gets the chance to play the Vic Open one day.

Holland will have pleasant memories of 13th Beach Golf Club's Beach course, which is the centrepiece of the Open's final round.

The Year 10 student at Haileybury College tore apart the tough layout with a brilliant seven-under 65 in his third round of the Junior Vic Open in late December.

While admitting the tees were much more forward than the real thing in early February, he still had to attack the pins on the undulating greens to compile his flawless round.

"I had played the Beach course a few times. I've always liked it, always thought it's a great tournament course. I won a tournament on it before, just a stableford event in a junior tournament run by 13th Beach," he said.

Holland picked up a shot at the second and chipped in from 20 metres for eagle at the short par-four fourth to lay the foundations for his memorable day.

"I didn't feel nervous, just stayed within myself. I knew I was playing well and just had to stay in the moment and not get ahead of myself," he said.

It was his lowest round by four shots, the previous best a 69 at Moonah Links 18 months earlier.

"About two weeks before this event, I shot two-under playing with a few mates on the West course (at Royal Melbourne), so I had a bit of form coming in," he said.

Holland attends Haileybury's Keysborough campus where he's captain of the golf team that plays against other schools in the spring and autumn terms.



Paul and Angela Wheelton with AMOTA green jacket winners Stephanie Kyriacou and Chun-An Yu

Wheeltons Drive Women's Golfing Dollar Further

The women's Australian Master of the Amateurs Championship has a couple of sterling supporters in its corner. KAREN HARDING speaks to them about their passion for encouraging women and girls.

Paul and Angela Wheelton may not be golfers themselves, yet they will leave an important mark on the game as it moves forward.

Their three-year sponsorship of the women's championship of the Australian Master of the Amateurs - which began

with the championship's first running in 2018 alongside the long-held men's championship - directly addresses one of their major philosophical and philanthropic missions: empowering females in sport.

AMOTA co-founders Peter and Angela Mann have had a green jacket for women in mind - and in the cupboard - since the first men's championship began 22 years ago but found it difficult through the early years to get the same level of financial support for a women's event as for a men's. It's a common story but one, fortunately, that is changing.

Through a business connection between Paul Wheelton and David Mann, brother of Peter, the Wheeltons became aware of the opportunity to support women golfers competing on an equal footing with the guys. It immediately resonated with them.

"It was not just about getting girls to play in a tournament. It was actually about seeing what was happening with women in sport and seeing the lack of funds that were going in," said Paul. "We would normally have sponsored through Budget (Paul owns the largest franchise group within Budget), but we elected to do it under

Wheelton Philanthropy because we wanted to send a message out to the philanthropic sector that there's a real need and opportunity for philanthropy to get behind avenues for women in sport, because it's just not happening fast enough. Support of women in sport needs a kick start and that's something that philanthropy can do."

Wheelton Philanthropy has the core pillars of women and girls, health and education, all underpinned by disadvantage and need. Supporting the women's AMOTA ticked all boxes. And both the Wheeltons and the Manns are delighted with the result.

Last year 24 females teed up for the inaugural women's event won by Japan's Yuka Yasuda, while this year the field doubled to 48 with 18 countries represented and an extensive waiting list.

"We were overseas the first year, so this was our first year here and we were quite blown away. We both realised the enormity of it," said Paul Wheelton.

Angela Mann was equally enthusiastic. "This is just so special," she said. "The women's event has brought a whole new dynamic to the field. It's a whole new excitement to the game. It's fantastic for women's golf and for the girls; they feel that we treat them as equal with the males, they're respected, and that they have a platform on which to show their skills. And the guys love it. They really love it, and they're so respectful, and I think that's how all golf should be played."

Respect for women not just in sport but in life is a huge part of the Wheeltons' work.

In 2018, Wheelton Philanthropy was awarded the inaugural International Philanthropy Award, presented as part of the Australia Philanthropy Awards and in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for its work with the Bali Children's Foundation, which has 4500 girls receiving education to prepare them for a better future.

"This work is one of the most exciting things we've done, to see it progress the way it has," said Angela Wheelton. Paul added: "We've really concentrated on girls because in Indonesia, girls are very much neglected."

Aside from the issue of gender equality, United Nations statistics suggest that 70% of a girl's earnings return to her village while only around 30% is returned via males. Education and subsequent employment for girls is a way to effect both social change and economic viability for poor villages.

The Wheeltons currently have a longitudinal study underway, following the progress of girls from education to employment. "We want to provide verifiable evidence to the local government there of the social and economic value of educating girls," said Angela Wheelton.

"We have one girl who would have been in the fields at ten but with us she did high school, then we got her to a Polytechnic in Denpasar to do civil engineering. There were 600 boys and just six girls; she came second in the school and is now doing a post-graduate degree," said Paul.

Both super-successful in their respective careers – Paul with 11 franchises under his

watch at Budget and Angela as the former CEO Australia and New Zealand for Swiss company Straumann – the Wheeltons have transferred their business acumen into modern philanthropy, which has moved beyond simple charitable giving to those in need (though they still do that) to strategic planning, having an endgame for every project that allows the projects to ultimately manage themselves.

As for the women's AMOTA, the 2020 event will see a shared sponsorship between Wheelton Philanthropy and Budget. And with other philanthropists now looking at ways in which to be involved in this space, it is hoped that potential commercial sponsors will also see the value and advantages of investing in women's golf as well as other sports.

The gratitude of the female competitors was reflected in the words 2019 Australian Women's Master of the Amateurs champion Stephanie Kyriacou wrote to the Manns: "I would like to thank everyone involved, especially the Wheeltons for all their support of women's golf. The AMOTA is one of my favourite events of the year. Being able to win such a big event and getting my name on that trophy is such an honour. I'm already looking forward to coming back to this tournament next year and being the first person to defend their title!"

Happily, thanks to the Wheeltons' support, Kyriacou will be defending a shiny new green jacket, not that one in the cupboard from 22 years ago!

Stephanie Kyriacou, 18, from New South Wales stood up to the pressure of the final round of the women's Australian Master of the Amateurs at Royal Melbourne to shoot the day's low, a two-under 70, for a finishing total of two-over 290, besting Julienne Soo by three shots. Victorian Soo finished second to Yasuda last year.

The confidence Kyriacou derived from winning such a big four-round stroke tournament helped her a month later when she made the cut in the Vic Open.

The men's AMOTA produced an incredible finish that was as miraculous for Chinese Taipei 20-year-old Chun-An Yu as it was demoralising for Japan's Keita Nakajima. Yu, who

is based in the US playing the college circuit for Arizona State, started the day five strokes adrift but fired five birdies on the front nine on his way to a final round 67. Nakajima, the 2018 Australian Amateur champion who finished equal fifth in the Australian Open late last year, was still a shot clear when he landed on the 72nd green in regulation. But three putts from 15 metres dropped him into a playoff at a six-under total of 282.

On the second sudden-death hole, Nakajima had a two-metre putt for victory but just missed. Third time around, Yu knocked a seven-iron approach to a metre, made the putt and claimed the jacket.

World number one amateur Justin Suh finished inside the top-10 as did world number four Matthew Wolff, who has a somewhat quirky swing but clearly a big future. Upon returning to the USA after the Australian Master of the Amateurs, Wolff played in the Phoenix Open on the US PGA Tour and made the cut.

He seems set to continue the AMOTA tradition of attracting rising amateurs on their way to the big time – players of the calibre of Rickie Fowler, Jason Day, Tommy Fleetwood, Bryson DeChambeau, Andy Sullivan and Victor Dubuisson.

In 2020 the Master of the Amateurs championships will be hosted by Victoria Golf Club from January 7-10.



Brothers Jayden and Noah McLeod with sisters Rebecca and Georgia Bryden have been playing golf together at Heywood since they were small children.

THE THEYW

In country towns, golf often struggles to gain the same attention as other sports. But in Heywood, two brothers and two sisters have grown up with the game, emerging with enduring friendships. BRIAN MELDRUM met the talented quartet.

Over in Victoria's far south-west, the sporting culture that exists in towns that dot the rolling hills between the coast and the Grampians doesn't stray very far from the norm.

For the younger generation in particular, a bit of tennis and cricket in the summer months only serves as a bridge between the winters, which are dominated by football and netball.

Sisters Rebecca and Georgia Bryden, and brothers Jayden and Noah McLeod, grew up in Heywood, a small town about 30 kilometres north-west of Portland, home to the Alcoa aluminium smelter.

The youngsters, of course, played the team games but the real and enduring sporting

passion for all four of them was, and still is, golf. Which in Heywood puts them very much in the minority.

In fact, at one stage a few years ago they were Heywood Golf Club's only junior members. "The odd one or two would come in, and then wander off," the boys' mum Debbie said. "But they were the only ones who stuck."

Stuck, not just as golfers but as very firm friends. "We get along too well," joked Rebecca. "We've grown up together, at school and such, so we're like a little family." So much so, in fact, that the McLeods and the Brydens have become very close, travelling as one to golf tournaments far and wide and going on camping trips together.

So, what inspired four kids in a football-netball mad town to embrace golf? As is so often the case, it was a family thing. The parents played golf and the children followed suit, albeit from different beginnings.

"Jayden and Noah were only little kids when they'd squash onto the golf buggy with their plastic clubs and come around with us when we were playing," Debbie said.

Now the boys are familiar figures in tournaments across the south-west and beyond. They each did work placements with Warrnambool pro Craig Bonney, who has continued to keep an eye on their swings.

And after playing alongside them at Heywood recently, it is obvious that both of them are very talented young players. They each are playing off a GA handicap of two and would dearly love to have a crack at playing pennant golf in Melbourne if an opportunity were to come their way.

Jayden, 19, won the Heywood club championship in 2017 and was runner-up last year, and both he and Noah, 17, helped the Western District Golf Association win the nett section at last year's Victorian Boys Country Championships.



ODD FOUR

They are members at both Heywood and Portland and while Noah is yet to win a club championship, he took multiple winner Barry Wilson to the fifth extra hole in a quarter-final of the Portland championship last year.

For the Bryden girls, netball was their favourite sport until their dad Darren suggested they give golf a try. Well, more than suggested. "He sort of made us get into it," Rebecca said, laughing. "But after a while we really started to enjoy it."

Under the tutelage of golf teachers such as Paul Smith at Port Fairy, Greg Davis at Mt Gambier, and South West Academy of Sport coach Brook Salmon, both Rebecca and Georgia now are firmly entrenched in the lower handicap echelons. Younger sister Lindsay also took to the game but while she enjoys having a hit with her family members and friends, she is not as passionate about it as her older siblings.

It was only natural that the Bryden and McLeod kids would hook up and in the

past six or seven years, as well as playing individual events they have teamed together in tournaments across the south-west and also at state level.

Both Rebecca and Georgia have won the girls' nett section of the Victorian Secondary Schools Championship and Jayden has been runner-up in the boys' nett section. And when she was just 14, Georgia played multiple championship winner Wendy Ryan in the final of the Heywood club championship, taking her far more experienced rival the full distance to lose on the 36th hole.

In another fine performance, all four represented Heywood District Secondary College to win the Greater Western Region final of School Sports Victoria's golf championship, and Rebecca and Noah are past winners of Heywood's mixed foursomes championship.

Incidentally, the flag won at the Greater Western Region final, the only golf flag the

school has ever won, cannot be found hanging among the other sporting flags that have been won by Heywood College. "No-one knows where it is," Noah said.

It's a sad reflection of the fact that the school and, more importantly, the students have little or no interest in golf, something that frustrates the quartet, particularly the two girls.

Their mum Lynne pointed out that the girls had mentors to help them develop in the game, among them Portland's Barb Bibby and the late Anne Learmonth from Port Fairy, and that they in turn were keen to help others. "But it is very hard; there just seems to be no interest down here."

Rebecca spent time working with Golf Victoria's Tony Collier, doing clinics at schools in the area as well as doing them on her own. "It was my dream as a kid to do what Tony does," she said. "But it never happened." Now 20, she works in Hamilton as a hairdresser but still loves the game.

She's managed to get her partner Christian interested, which gives her a ready-made excuse for them to often pop down to Heywood and catch up with family and friends, as often as not on the golf course.

Golf trips to Melbourne have made Georgia realise there are nowhere near the same resources and opportunities available to golf in the far west as there are in the city. A sandbelt club did approach her with a view to perhaps playing pennant at some point but at the time she wasn't old enough to have a licence and Heywood to Melbourne is a four-hour journey. End of story.

Now 18, she hasn't given up hope of perhaps one day working to bring others into the game but for now is content to just play the game and enjoy it. "I've got a few mates interested enough to go out and have a bash and a laugh, and that's good. And I often play competition at Portland."

The McLeod boys continue to be fully involved with the game. Their mother Debbie plays regularly and father Matt has been the WDGA's junior co-ordinator for the past three years. "We're always talking about golf," Matt said, laughing.

Jayden and Noah have been playing in club competitions since they were 10 or 11.



From left, Jayden, Noah, Rebecca and Georgia have grown up with the game.

"Because we are a small club and our membership was down, as soon as they joined and got a Golf Link number, they were able to come out and play," Matt explained. "At a lot of clubs you have to be 13 before you can play competition."

Each of the 'Heywood Four' can list various achievements in the game but Noah, the youngest, can rightly claim to stand apart from the others. He's the only one of them to have notched a hole-in-one – and he's done it twice. Remarkably the aces came less than a week apart, and couldn't have been more different.

Playing the 155-metre, par-three 17th hole at Portarlinton, the club's signature hole, Noah hit a seven-iron straight at the flag; the ball took one bounce and went in.

"Now come on, tell him about the other one," said his mum. Noah smiled sheepishly. Just days after the Portarlinton ace, he pulled out a wedge on Portland's 127-metre, par-three eighth. "I hit a duck-hook into a tree but it bounced off it onto the green and rolled into the hole," he said.

The others smiled and shook their heads. Even Noah couldn't help laughing.

SOUTH WEST CLASSIC

Footy, cricket, netball, tennis ... you name it, there are always bragging rights attached to any contest between two towns just a 20-minute drive apart.

The same has been true of golf, but in recent years the Heywood and the Portland Golf Clubs have found common ground in the form of a four-day tournament – the South West Golf Classic.

It was the brainchild of local Lyndi Ball, who is associated with both clubs. For three years she's been the manager at Portland GC, but her father and her brother both play at Heywood.

It was from them she got the idea for the South West Classic. "Every year they cross the border and play the Southern Ports tournament, and they love it," Ball explained.

The Southern Ports Golf Week is a joint venture of the Robe, Kingston and Beachport Golf Clubs, on South Australia's Limestone Coast. Ball thought to herself, 'Why can't we do something like that with Heywood?'

She put it out there and both clubs embraced the idea. "It wouldn't have happened without the full co-operation of both committees. They really got behind it."



Now having just completed its third year, the tournament, played across the second weekend in January, has competitions that cater for golfers at all levels, both male and female, and features a 36-hole stroke event for golfers with a Golf Australia handicap of up to 8.8.

So far the stroke event has seen the first round played at one course on Saturday and the second at the other on Sunday, but Ball says the aim is to have a field big enough to use both courses on both days.

"It might take a while, perhaps five years, but we're confident we can get there. The numbers were up this year and there were a lot of quality players."

Teenage Champs

PUT STUDY FIRST

Andre Lautee (left) and Maddison Hinson-Tolchard are the reigning Victorian Amateur Champions.





Maddison Hinson-Tolchard may not be in the shade for long.

The two winners of the Victorian Amateur Championship may one day be household names. For now, however, they share the same priority, as they explained to STEVE PERKIN.

They're young and talented, with the golfing world at their feet, but for now, Andre Lautee and Maddison Hinson-Tolchard are planting their soft spikes firmly in classrooms, and fairways can wait.

In December, Lautee and Hinson-Tolchard won their respective sides of the Victorian Amateur Championships and the significance of their wins certainly didn't escape them, even if it did go unnoticed by Melbourne's daily newspapers which failed to carry a line.

Lautee is 19, Hinson-Tolchard 17 but just 16 when she became one of the youngest winners of the 124-year-old event, and they now have their names on golf trophies alongside the best male and female golfers this state has ever seen.

Lautee won the men's title after four rounds of stroke and four knockout matches, a tough competition to win by any measure and one the Kingston Heath member now adds to a growing resume.

His golfing journey started not unlike Hinson-Tolchard's. Encouraged to take up the game by his father, Andre fell in love with golf before he became a teenager and had a handicap of 20 at the age of 12.

By the time he was 15, he was playing off two.

"I was about eight or nine when Dad took me to the Studley Park par-three course and almost straight away I enjoyed it. I played at Ivanhoe Golf Club, then moved to Rosanna when I was 12 and played there until I joined Kingston Heath when I was 16.

"For me it's been golf since the age of 12. I played football, soccer, tennis... but I just enjoyed golf the most. I liked the individuality and that you control what's happening."

As well as having the technique, Lautee showed from an early age that he could also close things out.

In 2016, he won the Murray River Junior Masters with rounds of 73, 70 and 73. He'd finished second the year before.

At Rosanna he won a club championship and he did the same thing at Kingston Heath last year. Any club member will tell you these titles aren't easy things to win. Last year he was also the leading amateur at the Victorian PGA, finishing an impressive eighth.

But his crowning moment was certainly the Victorian Amateur title.

After the four stroke rounds, Lautee was placed eighth, an impressive showing given the event attracted 168 players and included the best amateurs from all over Australia and 55 overseas players.

In his quarter-final, played at Huntingdale, Lautee beat the 2017 Australian Amateur Champion Matias Sanchez 4&2 and in his semi-final overcame Metropolitan amateur Ben Henkel 5&3.

This pushed him further than his 2017 semi-final defeat to the eventual winner.

The final saw him up against state-team player Kyle Michel, from Shepparton. Holding a slender lead for most of the day, Lautee left the door open for a comeback when he drove into the trees on the right of the 17th.

He was relieved when his opponent did the same thing, meaning both players had to chip out sideways, and the resultant bogeys to both players gave Lautee a 2&1 win.

"By winning the Victorian Amateur I proved to myself that I can win big events against the best players and it was pretty cool seeing my name on that trophy alongside Peter Thomson, Mike Clayton and so many other outstanding players."



Studying hard ... Andre Lautee on the green at Huntingdale.

As if that wasn't cool enough, four days later Lautee won the dual titles of the Woodlands Open Amateur and the Victorian Men's Champion of Champions titles at Woodlands Golf Club.

Reduced to just 18 holes because of lightning and rain, Lautee's two-under-par 70 left him one shot clear of Antony Majstorovic.

Then in mid-January, Lautee teed it up in the Australian Amateur, again at Woodlands Golf Club, and although not winning, he was far from disgraced, carding rounds of 65 and 72 to qualify for the matchplay rounds in ninth position.

After a 4&3 win in the round of 16, Andre lost a tight second-round match 2&1 to England's Michael Farr.

So, after several months of outstanding golf, Lautee admits he's reassessing his future although he's determined to keep his feet firmly planted on the ground, which means he has no immediate plans to turn professional.

"It won't happen in the near future. I've got two years to go in my computer science course at Swinburne University and my Dad is pretty keen on me finishing and getting my degree.

"My immediate aim will be to get into the Victorian Institute of Sport and this year's state team, then to play a few events overseas although I haven't decided whether this will be in America or the UK. Certainly the British Amateur is one I want to play."

Maddison Hinson-Tolchard was also steered towards golf by a father and assorted family members who all played.

"I was about eight when I started playing some My Golf five-hole events and almost straight away I wanted to be a professional," says the confident West Australian whose family home is just a short iron from the Gosnells Golf Club in the southern Perth suburb of Canning Vale.

"That's still my plan, but I've got to finish school (she's in Year 12 at Penrhos College). It's what my parents have always insisted: have a back-up plan because golf is a hard industry. I'm in my final year. After that, maybe college in America."

Despite winning the Australian Girls title at Royal Perth in April last year, Hinson-Tolchard says winning the Victorian Amateur, her first senior title, gave her the bigger thrill.

"I've never been good at matchplay – much better at strokeplay because I don't deviate too much – so getting through the matchplay surprised me. It surprised my family, too."

In an all-WA final, Maddison overcame state teammate Kirsten Rudgeley after carding five consecutive birdies on the second 18 holes of the 36-hole final.

A fortnight after that win, she was teeing it up in the Australian Amateur at Woodlands and was tied 15th after two stroke rounds of 75 and 71. She lost her round-of-16 match to South Korea's Yae-Eun (Amy) Hong, the eventual winner of the title.

Hinson-Tolchard has been a regular WA state team member at both junior and senior levels, captained the junior team last year, and at the time of writing was the sixth-ranked amateur nationally and 330th in the world.

Getting both rankings down will be as important to her as getting her school grades up, so it's going to be a big year. There's little doubt she has the work ethic to succeed.

"I practise pretty much every day, concentrating on my short game – getting more accurate – because I feel my long game is ok.

"If I have spare time, I try to relax with friends or get out on my family's boat. And I got a car for Christmas, so I'm looking forward to getting my licence."

BOB MULTIPLIES THE FUN



Bob Stonehouse (centre) with fellow multipliers Craig Gardiner (left) and Mitchell Gardiner (right).

On a pretty hot day in January, Neangar Park's Bob Stonehouse rocked up to his club to play a round with his clubmates. The game was multiplier stableford, in which players multiply their stableford score by their partner's score. Fun if you both have a minimum two stableford points; maybe not so much if one goes out on the hole. After all, zero times anything is zero.

On this day Bob had two partners, being in a group of three with father and son Craig and Mitchell Gardiner. As the first-listed

player in the group on the club computer, Bob became the "swinger". The three did very nicely indeed – Mitchell had a steady 35 points off a handicap of 29, Bob had a healthy 43 points off 21 and Craig produced an outstanding 47 points off 16.

But on multiplier, Bob and Craig finished with – wait for it – 117 points, some 31 points ahead of the runners-up, Bob again with Mitchell on 86 points. Bob and Craig's total equates to an average of over six points per hole, pretty good in itself, but it

was helped big time by the 16th. Both Bob and Craig birdied the hole for four points each, making their total 16 points on just that hole. Sixteen points on the 16th has a nice ring to it, they reckon.

A former member at Eastern Golf Club, where he reached his lowest handicap of 10, Bob, now 80 years young, has been a longtime member of Neangar Park, home to rising star Lucas Herbert. And some pretty fine multipliers!



HELP GOLF GIVE A HELPING HAND TO KIDS WITH AUTISM

Any day out at Woodlands is already sure to be a pretty good one. Being able to support a wonderful cause at the same time? Even better.

The Helping Hands Golf Day will be returning to Woodlands for a sixth year on Friday March 22, raising funds for Helping Hands ASD Intervention.

ASD stands for Autism Spectrum Disorder and it is estimated that one in 63 children has a formal autism diagnosis.

Helping Hands provides support for affected families in many ways, with a centre that specialises in Applied

Behavioural Analysis to attain lasting improvements in a child's behaviour, communication, cognition, motor skills, independent living skills, play and social interaction. It also has case managers to help parents manage problem behaviours, with programs tailored to each child's strengths and weaknesses to ensure he/she can make as much progress as possible.

The annual Helping Hands Golf Day is played over 18 holes of ambrose, starting at 1pm with a shotgun start following a light lunch at midday. In the evening, there will be a three-course dinner with

entertainment featuring comedian Dave O'Neil as the master of ceremonies, along with raffles and auctions (both silent and 'loud!').

The cost of the day is \$250 per person or \$960 for a table of four, with early-bird discounts of \$20 per person or \$80 per table available before March 12. This covers the golf, entertainment, lunch and dinner, with all drinks (excluding spirits) included. All profits will go to the Helping Hands Foundation.

For more information or to register, please contact Michele Backholer on **9585 5697** or **0419 586 094**.



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Nikki Wilson is in full swing as she seeks to get more women into golf.

NIKKI SEEKS FAIRWAY BIRDIES

With a little help from her mother and her daughter, Nikki Wilson has become a passionate golfer doing her bit to increase female participation in golf. **KAREN HARDING** speaks with her.

Nikki Wilson loves golf. As in – loves, loves, LOVES golf!

Ask her what she loves about it so much and her answer is immediate: “It’s everything,” she says. “It’s the mental stimulation – that covers the competitive side of me where I’m able to be competitive – with the game, not with individuals. It’s physically demanding but not so demanding that anyone can’t play. The social aspect is the key one, that’s number one. Making new friends, meeting other people and hearing their stories, having a good laugh. It’s the fresh air, the environment. And when I’m out on the golf course I don’t think of anything else. Life is not always a bowl of cherries for anyone; when you’re out there, you just concentrate on playing and connecting with others.”

Such is the level of Nikki’s passion for the game that she wants everyone to have a go. Specifically women and girls, since that’s where she sees the greatest opportunity, both for the game and for women and girls themselves.

Somehow that translated itself into Fairway Birdies, a blog she created to encourage more females into the game. Somehow? Well, it was not really in her plans.

Nikki’s journey in golf is not an uncommon one. She comes from a golfing family, as many do. Both her parents play and her sister Simone McClure (now Thompson) was an elite player in her youth, representing Victoria in the state team and playing Division One pennant for Victoria Golf Club.

But young Nikki wasn’t into it. “I was playing tennis and doing a lot of running, track and field, netball, that sort of thing.” Family conversations at the dinner table revolving around golf seemed boring to her, although she allowed herself to be persuaded by mum Barbara to attend a clinic and made the occasional foray onto the course, if only to be in everyone’s company. The family connection to golf was only strengthened by her marriage to John, himself a golfer.

The catalyst to get into golf came, as it does for many women, with the realisation that she wanted to try something new, something stimulating, something challenging, something social. The loss of baby daughter Alana at 13 weeks to SIDS combined with her other two children Jeremy and Hannah starting school created a void that needed to be filled – but with what?

Never doubt the power of another mother, in this case her own. “I was just going a bit stir crazy, I needed to get out, and mum just said, ‘right, that’s it, let’s go’ and we went to Ivanhoe and found a clinic and I started there and we had three holes, six holes, nine holes and then I started playing in the ladies’ comp on Wednesdays.

“And the ladies there were awesome. I’d turn up off a handicap of 45 and played with literally anyone who was in my group and met some wonderful women. They took me under their wing and taught me how to play golf, basically.”

What Nikki would later realise was that even though her own entrée to golf was reasonably smooth, that is not necessarily the experience of other women. The mission of Fairway Birdies, indeed of Vision 2025 – Golf Australia’s strategy to raise the participation numbers of females in golf – is to make golf more welcoming and create a great experience.

“It has often been intimidating and difficult for women in the past and they’ve walked away,” Nikki says now. “But it can be simple, because you just need an encourager, the encouragement of *someone*, the inspiration of someone who is an existing golfer.”

Nikki was relating this to daughter Hannah on a trip between the Mornington Peninsula and her Kew home in late 2017 when Hannah, channelling the enthusiasm and drive of both mother and grandmother, said: “Well, you should do a golf blog.” By the time they reached Melbourne two hours later, there was up and running a website, an Instagram account, a Facebook page and a funky logo.

The response was very positive from family and friends, who all shared Fairway Birdies through their own social media. Great start, but still local.

Ah, but then came the power of another medium – television. In August 2018, Nikki was approached to be part of a lifestyle feature on the Sunday morning edition of the Today show, hosted by journalists Peter Stefanovic and Allison Langdon.

Nikki remembers being approached by one of the show’s producers. “They wanted to set up a live cross. I was in the car, just freaking out, and thinking, ‘are you serious’ and at the same time thinking ‘if I say no, my daughter is going to kill me,’ so I was shaking my head no and saying yes! Anyway, it was awesome because Peter plays golf and it was quite funny and very relaxed.”

The impact was immediate and huge. Over three and a half thousand hits on her website, 70 new subscribers and widespread commentary from around the country on her Instagram page. “I had ladies from Perth, New South Wales, Queensland all commenting, saying, ‘we’re watching you now’, and I didn’t know any of them.”

From this came clinics, also not part of the plan hatched in the car with Hannah.

“The clinics just evolved. At the start it was just a blog, I was just going to write articles on having a bit of fun, on my passion for golf, but I started getting all these messages from women saying, ‘you’ve inspired me, where do I go? So then I was doing research and looking for places for them to go.’”

One of these women was sent to Golf Australia’s Get On Course program, run by Erica Kreyborg, from where she went on to Sandringham. “She met a whole lot of girlfriends there and has already been to Noosa playing golf. It’s all about the integration. They need to be integrated with a group.”

Nikki next approached the renowned Bann Lynch McDade group at Yarra Bend, near her home, with a view to setting up

“IT HAS OFTEN BEEN INTIMIDATING AND DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN IN THE PAST AND THEY’VE WALKED AWAY. BUT IT CAN BE SIMPLE, BECAUSE YOU JUST NEED AN ENCOURAGER, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF SOMEONE, THE INSPIRATION OF SOMEONE WHO IS AN EXISTING GOLFER.”



From left, Karen, Nicky, Ruthie, James Hartley, Nikki Wilson, Aaron Shaw, Nicola, Philippa and Gabrielle

clinics under the Fairway Birdies banner. Happily, the coaching philosophy at Bann Lynch McDade mirrored her own goals.

James Hartley, one of the coaches overseeing beginner clinics at Bann Lynch McDade, says: "Aaron (Shaw) and I have been running beginner clinics since 2013 but over a period of time we had noticed that there was a big drop-off in people returning after their initial clinics and we thought that had a lot to do with the participants being confined to the driving range. They felt they needed to reach a pretty strong level of golf before they proceeded to the golf course.

"So we thought, why not *start* them on the course, start them really close to the hole and then work their way back. So we taught them to hole a very short putt and then took them out on the course to hole that short putt. The next week we'd work on the chipping green, then go on the course, chip onto the green and hole the putts.

"We were getting them comfortable with the idea of being on course, so by the time they finish their first block of four lessons, they've spent quite a bit of time out there and made a group of friends with whom they can play. Building their confidence from an early stage is number one, I think. And our return rates are close to 100%, plus five ladies have already gone on to join the Yarra Bend Ladies group, which plays on Tuesdays and Fridays."

Twenty-eight women, an astonishing figure, attended the first Fairway Birdies clinics in October. All have signalled an intention to return to the February clinics, boosted by an additional 32 women recruited through Fairway Birdies.

It's all been heady growth in a short time. And the possibilities excite Nikki: "The sky's the limit!"

So, what is needed to touch the sky?

"Persistence," she says. "What I would eventually like is to get the clinic model into areas around Melbourne under the Fairway Birdies banner. North, south, east, west, regional areas and interstate. And because it's solely based on social media, I also need to get some more followers.

"My end goal, my aim, is to have golf clubs, schools, public golf courses use the social media network of Fairway Birdies to attract women and girls.

"What I drive through Fairway Birdies is the inspiration and motivation to do it, and the strength and the skills to make the phone call and just do it. A lot of women are interested but they don't know the pathway, they are nervous to ring up and find out, they don't have the resources I have to find a golf course. It's about the women in the industry too. Within clubs, we need to be welcoming as well."

Currently self-funding Fairway Birdies, a decision looms for Nikki as to whether to continue in an altruistic fashion, whether to seek funding under NGO status, or whether to seek a commercial

partnership in some form. For the moment, though, she's just glad to be "taking baby steps and having fun".

And what of Hannah, the encourager of the encourager? Well, Hannah and some of her friends are doing one of the clinics in March. And that's Nikki's doing too. "If it wasn't for Mum, I probably wouldn't have tried it, I don't think. Just watching what she's been doing has influenced me the most. It's changing the perspective on golf and once you change your perspective on it, you're like, well, it has so many good aspects to it, so why not!

"I'm incredibly proud of her and the effort she goes to, to ensure that the community she is building is supported and that she is encouraging as many women as possible. Her vision is coming true and I'm just so happy to see her enjoying herself in everything that she's doing."

From unlikely golfer to reluctant golfer to passionate golfer, with a burgeoning golf blog and an upcoming tenure as Women's Captain at Kingston Heath. That's the Nikki Wilson story. So far...

Website

www.fairwaybirdies.com

Facebook

Fairway Birdies

Instagram

@fairwaybirdies

Twitter

@nikkiwilsongolf



NO, LEISH, WE'RE BETTER THAN THAT

It's not every day you hold the high moral ground. In my (limited) experience, it's not something you give up voluntarily.

Which is why Marc Leishman is wrong about Presidents Cup crowds in Melbourne later this year.

Leishman said after the World Cup of Golf, where he and Cameron Smith were runners-up last year, that he'd like to see Australian crowds treat the Americans playing at the Presidents Cup in November a bit like the way the parochial (and that's putting it kindly) Yanks treated the International team at Liberty National in 2017.

There's a history here, of course, and I don't doubt for a minute that it was tough for Leishman and the other Internationals back then. You may remember that Audrey Leishman, Marc's American wife, drew some attention by blogging about all this afterward:

"There were many times last week that I thought about what the kids were seeing," she penned. "The crowds booing for good shots and cheering for missed putts. The drinking at 7am? Screaming 'Big

Easy to [assistant captain] Ernie Els and begging for his autograph and then yelling at his players. Heckling a wife for her beauty and then her husband for his play. I was thankful my boys weren't there to see the way people were treating their daddy. Their hero. My parents could simply turn the television off."

It's true that American crowds can be some of the most unfair in all of sports and, quite frankly, are responsible for some of the most banal barracking that blights golf.

Gems such as:

"In the hole." (Often uttered from beside the tee on a par four hole, with the player plainly not in range).

"You da man!" (That particular one probably starting to peter out into the land of cliché, mercifully so).

But it can be much worse. At Liberty National in 2017, as an International player teed off, one patron yelled out: *"Get in the water!"*



Okay, so it's just one fruitcake, but the Internationals from the Presidents Cup and the European teams who have travelled to North America to play Ryder Cup will tell you that the kind of barracking that happens is something that does not belong in golf. It's more like a football game and if it helps their team, then that's fine as well.

We're not perfect, in this area, I must admit. Because we have *The Fanatics*, known in my circle as *The Insufferables*, a group of yellow-and-green-clad fans who came to prominence in golf at the 2011 Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne when Tiger Woods for one and Greg Norman for another were persuaded to join the group for a picture opportunity.

What were they thinking, the Shark and Tiger? Did they realise they were helping create a monster? The Fanatics is now a tour group sending the nationalistically inclined to sporting and cultural events around the world.

Mostly they are oxygen thieves in my book, their motivation to attract attention to themselves. The picture opportunities with Tiger and the Shark were just what they crave. I wish they'd stuck to the tennis and the cricket. They don't fit at the golf.

But by and large, our golf crowds are extremely respectful. Many of them, of course, are golfers themselves. Almost to a man and woman, they keep their traps shut when they are supposed to and support their team and the individuals within it when that's appropriate, too.

There were tens of thousands of them out at Royal Melbourne when the Presidents Cup was last played here in 2011, just about all of them hoping that the Internationals could make some sort of run at the Americans in conditions – crazy hard and fast – that were meant to help the underdogs.

The Americans won, as is the custom at the Presidents Cup, which is an issue in itself. For the credibility of the event, the Internationals

need to be more competitive, albeit that at its heart the Presidents Cup is an exhibition event, a celebration of golf, and not played with the same vitriol as we have seen in Ryder Cups.

But it was a fabulous event back in 2011 here and it will be great at Royal Melbourne again this November when Mr Woods leads his team back to our shores. The Internationals are batting one out of 12 in Presidents Cups, which is to say that they need some help. The 1998 triumph at Royal Melbourne under the late Peter Thomson remains the only time the chocolates came their way.

Now don't get me wrong about 'Leish', Warrnambool's finest and a very good man. I really like the guy, respect his game, enjoy his attitude. We all know he's been to hell and back with the near-death of his wife a few years ago and he's come through all that a better player, verging on a top-10 world ranking. There are few more popular figures in Australian golf and he will go down as an all-time great of the sport in this country.

I kind of understand what he was getting at after the World Cup at Metropolitan, when he said: "I've never played in front of crowds like that in Australia before. Having 98 per cent of the crowd going for you is a pretty cool feeling."

But I think he will get the best part of what he wants at Royal Melbourne. There will likely be a handful of Australians in the team as usual, including himself and Smith, whose laid-back attitude and fundamental 'Australianness' is starting to endear himself to the fans locally. Not to mention that he is a fabulous player with the best wedge game around.

The support will be strong but there will be respect for the visitors, too. I just think that we have to be very careful of going down an American track on this, diving to the bottom of the barrel to match something that is not classy at all.

Ba-ba Booy to that!

STAY HYDRATED STAY ON COURSE



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