

South African Blind Golf Association (SABGA)

The Phoenix Cup - 2007

Background

In August this year four players from the SABGA were selected to participate in the inaugural Phoenix Cup, which was staged near Toronto, Canada.

The competition was played over three days on a Ryder/Presidents Cup match play format with teams comprising ten players each. The four South African players, and their sighted guides, were as follows:



Back Row – The players:

Leon Strydom, Pieta le Roux, Johan Kotze & Garrett Slattery

Middle Row:

*Riaan Bubb (Pieta's guide), Peter Poverello (Johan's guide)
& Cynthia Slattery (Garrett's guide)*

Front:

Dirk Burger (Leon's guide)

Golf for the visually impaired is heavily reliant on the player's sighted guide. This person not only watches the golf ball, but assists the player with club selection and, vitally, line-up.

The Event

The first day's play comprised of singles. Garrett Slattery, drawn in the first match against Tim Nolan of Canada, had the privilege of hitting the competition's opening shot. Garrett went on to put the first points on the board with a solid 5&3 victory. Leon Stydom had a very convincing win against Paul Carnavan, and Johan Kotze picked up a half point with a drawn game against American Mike Drews. Johan had a great opening nine, but Mike fought back valiantly for the half. Pieta le Roux played a very good game, but a lip-out on the 18th meant that he lost 1 down to the North American captain, Glenn Babcock. The first day left the International Team with a good 7 – 3 lead.

Day 2, played on a scramble format, was where the Internationals put daylight between themselves and the North Americans. All five matches went to the Internationals. Both Garrett, paired up with the Internationals' captain, Jim Gales (who is totally blind), as well as Pieta, paired up with countryman Johan, were under par when their matches were completed. Leon paired up with Scotsman Gordon Dickson to inflict the only defeat of the week on the North American captain Glenn Babcock.

Day 3 was fairly much plain sailing for the Internationals. It would have been a clean sweep had it not been for the North American captain (and "most valuable player") winning the 18th to earn a half against Garrett. One of the highlights for us on the third day was Pieta's win over the current visually impaired World Champion, American Bruce Hooper. This victory played no small part in Pieta being selected as the Internationals' "MVP".

For the first foray of our players internationally they did exceptionally well. Not only did our players put on a good display of golf, but they also made some valuable new friendships.



Garrett with team captain Jim – and the Cup