

South African Blind Golf Association (SABGA)

British Blind Open & World Championships- 2008

Background

In August this year three players from the SABGA were selected to participate in the British Blind Open and International Blind Golf Association's (IBGA) World Championships, both staged in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Both events were 36 hole stroke play competitions, with a restricted entry from the 13 member countries of the IBGA. The three South African players, and their sighted guides, were as follows:

Pieta le Roux	guided by wife Elmarie
Garrett Slattery	guided by his father in the British Open and by Chris O'Donoghue in the World Championships
Leon Strydon	guided by Elzabe Weideman

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 British Blind Open

For the second time in its history this was staged at the Massereene Golf Club, west of Belfast. Leon got the ball rolling for the SABGA players when his team won the Pro-Am Scramble event (not Leon's first success in this format of play), which resulted in Leon winning himself a new rescue club.



Leon and guide Elzabe

The British Open itself though got off to an inauspicious start the next day in heavy rain. The rain just got worse and worse as the day went on, and ultimately resulted in the day's play having to be abandoned.

So it all came down to the last day. Pieta and Garrett got off to very good starts, with both playing below their handicaps on the first nine. Despite their second nines not being as good they ended up finishing 1st and 2nd respectively in the B2 gross event. Leon, who played in the B3 event, played some good golf but his downfall came on the very long and narrow 17th hole which was the most difficult on the course.



Garrett Slattery (Snr) & Garrett Slattery

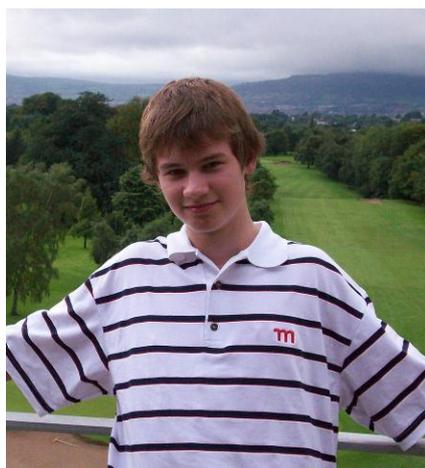
IBGA World Championships

This is the premier event in the IBGA golfing calendar, and takes place every two years. It was a great honour for Northern Ireland to be chosen to stage this event, and they were the first country in Europe to do so. Belvoir Park Golf Club, a parklands course south of Belfast, which has championship status, was chosen as the venue for the event. The Belvoir Park layout is one of the most challenging in the country, with its heavily wooded layout, rolling fairways, and testing length (with a couple of par 3's being close to 200 yards, and some of the par 4's exceeding 450 yards).

Over 50 players, from 13 countries, were selected to participate in the World Championships. These golfers represented the cream of the crop when it comes to visually impaired golf worldwide. Like in the other Blind Golf majors, competition is split into the three sight categories: B1 (totally blind), B2 (low vision partially sighted) and B3 (partially sighted, with up to 10% vision).

The challenging Belvoir Park layout resulted in some very high scores. On average, taking the top quarter of the players who participated in both events, scores went up by almost 9 strokes per round around Belvoir compared to Massereene. There was no doubt that Belvoir Park was a stern test of golf.

The South Africans were determined to put our association on the World map in this, our first, participation in the World Championships. They did not disappoint.



*Garrett's guide for the World Championships, Chris O'Donoghue
(Picture taken from the balcony of Belvoir Park Golf Club)*

After the first round the South African pair of Pieta & Garrett, like in the British Open the previous week, found themselves first and second respectively in the B2 category.

The electric atmosphere for the final round was rather dampened by the heavy rain that faced the players at Belvoir Park. With almost all of the field having teed off, and with Garrett standing on the first tee and Pieta down the first hole ahead of him, the weather siren went to call players in. Two hours later play was officially abandoned.

And so it was, in the "liquid sunshine" of Belfast, that the South African Blind Golf Association could lay claim to having the B2 (partially sighted) World Champion & Runner-up.



Elmarie & Pieta with the IBGA World Championship Trophies

Well done to all three SABGA players and their guides. And last, but by no means least, a huge thanks must go to our main sponsors (Momentum & The Nomads), without whose support none of this would have been possible.

The Results

British Blind Open

- B1 Gross 1. Zohar Sharon (Israel)
 2. Brian MacLeod (Canada)
 3. Jim Hamilton (Canada)
- B2 Gross 1. Pieta le Roux (South Africa)
 2. Garrett Slattery (South Africa)
 3. Roy Bert (Canada) &
 Mark Arnold (USA)
- B3 Gross 1. Ron Plath (USA)
 2. Mike Mayo (Scotland)
 3. Steve Beevers (England)
- Overall Nett 1. Mike Mayo (England)

World Championships

- B1 Gross 1. Zohar Sharon (Israel)
 2. Brian MacLeod (Canada)
 3. Bob Andrews (USA)
- B2 Gross 1. Pieta le Roux (South Africa)
 2. Garrett Slattery (South Africa)
 3. Andy Sellars (England)
- B3 Gross 1. Ron Plath (USA)
 2. Simon Cookson (England) &
 Mike Mayo (Scotland)
- Overall Net 1. Mike Loton (England)
 2. Allan Morgan (Scotland)
 3. Glenn Babcock (Canada),
 Pieta le Roux (South Africa),
 Garrett Slattery (South Africa), &
 Paul Appleyard (England)
- Women 1. Jenny McCullam (Australia)
 2. Jan Dinsdale (Northern Ireland)
 3. Johanna Camarta (Canada)