

SOUTH AFRICAN BLIND GOLF ASSOCIATION (SABGA)

British Blind Open - 2011

Background

At the end of June Garrett Slattery, a member of the Stellenbosch Golf Club, guided by his son Brendon, a Grade 8 learner at Paul Roos High School, represented the SABGA in the British Blind Open, staged at the Templepatrick Golf Club near Belfast in Northern Ireland. The event was a 36-hole stroke play competition, with a field of 40 players from all around the world.

As in other Blind Golf events, competition is split into three sight categories: B1 (totally blind), B2 (low vision partially sighted) and B3 (partially sighted, with up to 10% vision). The B2 category, in which Garrett competed, was the largest category making up approximately half of the field in this year's British Open.

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, crucially, alignment.



Brendon indicating the line of play to Garrett in the British Open

The Templepatrick Course

The Templepatrick golf course features a challenging layout, with well-positioned water hazards in play on 14 of the 18 holes. Wayward shots were penalised by heavy rough. Windy conditions added to the difficulty.

One of the greatest challenges was the fast and severely undulating greens. Even the most experienced golfers and their guides struggled to find the correct line and pace on the tricky greens.

The Pro-Am / Sponsor's Day

Prior to the tournament there was a Pro-Am/Sponsor's Day, in which blind golfers teamed up with invited guests to play in a scramble format. The day went well for Garrett who, teamed up with a totally blind lady golfer from Italy, Chaiara Pozzi, and two local players finished third after a gross 71.

The British Open 2011

Tough conditions on day 1 saw no player bettering the course, with the leaders scoring net 73's on the par 72 layout. Garrett's 78 put him in the top six after day one and saw him teeing off in the third last pairing on the second day.

Weather conditions remained difficult on day two, but the infamous Northern Ireland rain stayed away. Garrett had a neck-and-neck battle with playing partner Neil Baxter on the last day, which saw Baxter slightly ahead with 9 holes to play. An excellent 9 iron by Garrett to two feet from the hole on the par 4 14th saw Garrett get his nose in front with a birdie. Despite failing to convert a good second shot which reached the fringe of the par 5 18th for 2 into a birdie, Garrett finished the day with a net 75, one stroke ahead of his playing partner Baxter.

With the other golfers in the B2 sight category who scored in the 70's on day one fading on day two, Garrett emerged as the B2 British Open champion.

This was Garrett's first victory in one of the Blind Golf Majors, and it was made all the more special by having his son, Brendon, present as his guide. This was Brendon's first exposure to guiding in an international event and he handled the pressure exceptionally well.



*Garrett with the B2 British Open Winner's Trophy
and Brendon with his trophy for guiding*

The trophy for the best overall performance, and title of British Open Champion, went to England's John Eakin, a 9 handicap golfer who played in the B3 sight category, whose final round of 69 net saw him pull clear of the field. Garrett finished as overall runner-up to John Eakin.

Results

The various sight category winners were:

B1	Andrea Calcaterra (Italy), 162
B2	Garrett Slattery (South Africa), 153
B3	John Eakin (England), 142
Ladies	Jan Dinsdale (Northern Ireland)

Overall:

Winner	John Eakin (England)
Runner-up	Garrett Slattery (South Africa)