

SOUTH AFRICAN BLIND GOLF ASSOCIATION (SABGA)

Japan Blind Golf Open Championship - 2013

September 2013 saw the staging of the Japan Blind Golf Open at the Mishima Golf Club. South African Blind Golf was represented by Garrett Slattery, a member of the Stellenbosch Golf Club, guided by his son Brendon, a Grade 10 learner at Paul Roos High School. This was the first time a member of SABGA has participated in one of the IBGA “majors” in the Far East.

The Championship event was a 36-hole stroke play competition, and had a field of over 60 players representing 9 countries. The major funder of Japanese Blind golf, Dr. Haruhise Handa, took time out from his busy schedule to be present for the duration of the event. Dr. Handa (of ISPS Handa fame – sponsor of many tour events such as the Wales Open and seniors & ladies tours) had also invited several professional golfers to be present and to play in the exhibition groups. These golfers included the Australian star Wayne Grady, and Hall of Fame great Nancy Lopez. It was a great privilege for the players to be able to meet and chat to such legends of the game of golf.



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 and Garrett looking for the line

The Mishima Golf Course

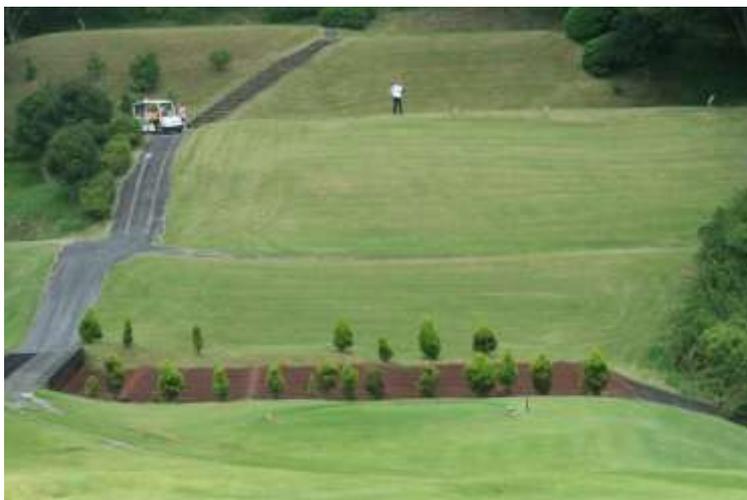
Set in the hills near the famous world cultural heritage site of Mount Fuji, the golf course was the hilliest that Garrett has ever played on. Not a long course, much of its challenge lay in negotiating the very hilly terrain. An off line shot could easily result in the next shot having to be played with the ball at waist height or, even worse, far below your feet.

With the course being carved out of the hills and valleys there were several holes where out of bounds was lurking close to the fairway on both sides. There were a couple of holes where an interesting local rule came into play, allowing a golfer who has hit a ball across a particular line of stakes (and thereby probably dropping down 5-10 metres to another hole) to treat the stakes as the boundary to a lateral hazard and drop back where the ball crossed the stakes for a one stroke penalty. In most instances the only sensible alternative would have been to take a stroke and distance penalty as it would have been just about impossible to negotiate the bank of trees as well as the elevation.

The greens were large and undulating, and were in excellent condition. It was interesting to see that most holes offered the club two greens to choose from. The Championship was, however, played to the same 18 greens both days.

The golf carts were automated, following a pre-determined route around the course and automatically stopping at the tees. Apart from protecting the course this had the very real benefit that no-one is going to drive the cart down a ravine or into a river.





Views of the Mishima Golf Course

The Championship

The playing conditions were very good, although it was extremely humid. The early leader in the B2 category in which Garrett played was Australian Gary Sargent with an impressive 89. Garrett, after crossing the out of bounds markers too many times, found himself well off the pace after the first round.

A better second round 91 from Garrett, which included an eagle 2 on the par 4 7th hole, saw Garrett jump up into second spot – ahead of the first round leader, but behind another Australian, Sean Witting who came in with an 88 on the second day.

Brendon is now almost an old hand at guiding, as he has successfully guided Garrett to silverware in Canada, the UK and now Japan over the last couple of years. Once again Brendon handled the pressure of a big event extremely well.



The B2 Runner-up Trophy