

## **SOUTH AFRICAN BLIND GOLF ASSOCIATION (SABGA)**

### **Inaugural IBGA Vision Cup (International Team Matchplay) – 2013**

In October 2013 the International Blind Golf Association (IBGA) staged its first international team matchplay event along the lines of the famous Ryder Cup. Competition was between the North American Team (with players from USA & Canada) and the World Team (with players from elsewhere in the world). The event was staged at the Green Island Country Club, Columbus, Georgia, USA.

Teams consisted of 13 players (4 each from each of the sight categories B1, B2 and B3 plus one additional captain's pick). The players for each of the two teams were selected as the top 4 ranked players in each of the 3 sight categories. The world team comprised 6 players from England & Wales, 2 from Italy and 1 each from Austria, Israel, Japan, Korea and South Africa (Garrett Slattery, a member at the Stellenbosch Golf Club).

The event was the inspiration of local businessman Scott Ressemeyer, who sponsored a wonderful historic trophy constructed from crystal & wood which were over 100 years old and orchestrating much of the fund-raising for the event.



#### The Green Island Country Club

The Green Island golf course, which for several years was host to the Southern Open on the US PGA Tour, presented a very challenging layout. With tree-lined fairways, large fast greens, and lots of water, wayward shots could be heavily punished.

The course was in perfect condition, and the weather was good despite the threat of some rain. From the club professional (Do-right) and his assistants (including a young South African, Rourke van der Spuy, playing the US Q-school) to all the club's staff the players were made to feel most welcome for the 3-day event.

#### The Vision Cup

The competition consisted of singles matches and pairs matches (the latter played using the Pinehurst system, whereby both players in the pair tee off and then swap balls to play the second shot, after which the better ball is selected and played out on an alternate shot basis).

Day 1 saw Garrett pairing up with former SABGA member Pieta le Roux (now resident in England), taking on former World Champion Jeremy Poincenot (US) and Jean-Yves Vigneaut (Canada). The match was tied after 5 holes, but a string

of 7 holes where Garrett & Pieta played 1 under par saw them build up a commanding lead and ultimately a 3&2 victory. The World Team took a slender ½ point lead into the second day.

Like all blind golf events the role of the sighted guide is essential. Both Pieta and Garrett were fortunate to have been provided with very able local golfers to assist them. Garrett's guide, Brent Paul (a +2 handicap golfer who is looking to qualify for the US tour himself) and Pita's guide Lindsay (a scratch golfer from South Africa on a golf scholarship at a local US college) certainly knew their way around the course and their experience proved invaluable.

The second day saw the World Team extend their lead to 2 points. Included in their wins was Garrett's impressive 9&7 win over Greg Hooper (US) who, despite having some good holes, struggled with pace on the fast greens.

All was set up for an exciting final day with 13 singles matches to be played. Garrett's 100% record came to an end when he met an in-form George Thirkill (Canada). Garrett's opponent of day 2 pulled off one of the wins of the day for the North Americans beating the World Team's lowest handicap golfer John Eakin (England).

With one match to be completed the World Team held a slender 1 point lead 13 to 12. The deciding match was between Chiarra Giacosa (Italy) and David Meador (US) (both B1 players – i.e. totally blind). As the teams and other spectators congregated around the 15<sup>th</sup> green Chiarra managed to win the hole and go 1 up. The 16<sup>th</sup> hole, a mid-length par 3 over a large water hazard, was to be pivotal. After Chiarra hit her ball onto the fringe David failed to clear the water. Chiarra went on to win the hole to be dormie 2 up – and thereby secure the inaugural (Ressmeyer) Vision Cup for the World Team.

The event was played in a wonderful spirit, and sets the stage perfectly for the return match to be held in Italy in 2015.



*The victorious World Team with the (Ressimeyer) Vision Cup*