

SOUTH AFRICAN BLIND GOLF ASSOCIATION (SABGA)

ISPS Handa Irish Blind Open & British Blind Open - 2014

During July Garrett Slattery, a member of the Stellenbosch Golf Club represented the SABGA in the Irish Blind Open & British Blind Open, staged at Roganstown Golf Club (Dublin, Ireland) & Templepatrick Golf Club (Belfast, Northern Ireland) respectively. The events were both 36-hole stroke play competitions, with fields of 30+ players from all around the world participating in each event.

The competition in blind golf events is split into three sight categories: B1 (totally blind), B2 (low vision partially sighted) and B3 (partially sighted, with up to 10% vision). 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. Garrett was guided by his wife, Cynthia, in the Irish Open and by his son, Brendon (a learner at Paul Roos Gymnasium) in the British Open.



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

The Courses

The Roganstown golf course, designed by Christy O'Connor Jnr, is situated amongst lakes and rolling hills with water coming into play on 12 of the holes. The course was the first course in Ireland to host a Euro pro tour event in 2006, and has also hosted the PGA Irish Championship. The fast and severely undulating greens added to the tactical demands of the championship layout.

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. One of the biggest challenges was the undulating greens. Even the most experienced golfers and their guides struggled to find the correct line and pace on the tricky greens. The greens were, however, slower than they were the last time the course staged the event in 2011.

The Irish Open

The first day of the event was made more challenging by the infamous Irish weather which saw rain gear going on and off for much of the round. Garrett's 100 (following a poor 18th hole) was good enough to give him a narrow 2-shot lead in the B2 category (gross) over Irishman Ed Macquire. The second round saw Garrett managing his game and the course much better, and his gross 88 saw him winning the B2 championship by an impressive 18 strokes over Macquire in 2nd and a further 3 ahead of Australia's Gary Sargent in 3rd. Garrett also finished 4th overall nett (and runner-up nett in the B2 category).

The B1 championship was won by the talented Italian, Chiara Giancosa Pozzi (208), who also won the best overall nett (136). The B3 championship was won by Steve Beevers of England (with an impressive 168 gross for the 36 holes).

The British Open

The weather was much kinder to the players than it was 3 years earlier when the event was last staged in Northern Ireland. With several players scoring nett scores below 70 nett Garrett's opening 96 (nett 76) left him with too much to do to feature in the nett prizes. Garrett's score was, however, again good enough to see him establish a first round lead in the B2 gross category. A second round 99 saw Garrett finishing with the best B2 gross, 17 shots ahead of Colin Simpson from Scotland and a further 4 shots ahead of Italy's Mirco Ghiggeri.

Italian Andrea Calcaterra won the B1 gross & nett competitions, scoring 211 (nett 147). In the B3 category Englishman John Eakin repeated his victory of 2011 with a phenomenal score of 157 gross. This also gave John the overall nett championship (with a nett 139) by a 5-shot margin.



Garrett with Irish Open (B2) Trophy