



## **Case study – Portpatrick based Pro transforms junior section**

### **The Challenges**

clubgolf's introductory game is progressively rolling out in schools across Dumfries & Galloway.

The area is broad and long and its PGA Pros are spread thinly. In the 60 miles between Portpatrick and Castle Douglas there are nine golf clubs but none has a golf professional.

Less than seven percent of local children are golf club members.

In 2008 Portpatrick GC lost 65 full members, a loss of £17,000 to the club.

### **The Solutions**

Portpatrick based Pro, James Erskine, became involved with clubgolf over two years ago and gave clubgolf Stage 1 and 2 coaching to children in nine local clubs.

He encourages local children to take up golf by teaching firstclubgolf in all 11 of his area's primary schools, working with over 1500 children in after schools clubs. Afterwards he invites them the club why they are offered free coaching and golf for a month.

James has been working with Ann Laing (clubgolf's Regional Manager for the South West) to encourage member of local clubs to become qualified volunteer coaches.

These volunteer coaches will coach the children, with James in a mentoring and support role "I've recommended to all clubs to get involved with clubgolf," said James. "Get some Level 1 volunteers and have a drive to attract juniors because it will increase their revenue."

### **The Results**

Portpatrick's junior membership has risen from 69 to 101 in just one year.

The club generates income from the moment children come through the door. "They spend money in the bar, on food and drink, and buying equipment," said James. "And their parents come up and want to get involved, so it's a huge cycle and everyone gets a spin off from it."

This spring Castle Douglas, Brighthouse Bay, New Galloway and Portpatrick GC's will have their first qualified Level 1 coaches. With new coaches and James taking on more of a supporting role he believes the coaching will be better structured and more productive.

### **The Future**

The target in the next two years is to get another 10% children involved in the nine clubs. That's another 200 active junior members.

James organised a fundraising event in March 2009 raising nearly £4000, which he will use to help improve the development of junior golf in the whole area.

## **Full interview with Portpatrick GC Pro, James Erskine (March 2009)**

### **The Challenges**

#### **What opportunities were there in the area for children before you took it on?**

Our area, from Portpatrick and Castle Douglas, is 50 miles across and has nine golf clubs which I coach at. But none of them has a golf professional and less than seven percent of local children are members of the clubs.

#### **So, how could local kids get any form of coaching?**

They would have to travel to the nearest Pro, in Dumfries.

#### **As a local who has gone on to compete on the Tartan Tour, how did you find it as a young golfer?**

Portpatrick has always been good with juniors. Ian Connelly, Tim Barter and Bill Lockie used to come here once a year and do coaching. I enjoyed it, worked hard at my game, won the

regional boys championship. I started as assistant Pro in Dumfries and moved back here three years ago to concentrate on playing.

## **The Solutions**

### **Why did you get you involved with junior coaching?**

I got involved with clubgolf about two years ago before the Pro (Haldane Lee) left the club and have been working with Ann Laing (clubgolf's Regional Manager for the South West) who has been very supportive and helpful. Before that I was involved with the Golf Foundation.

Originally I carried out Stage 1 and 2 coaching, going to all nine clubs local clubs and teaching their junior sections.

Then recently all the clubs began getting volunteer coaches trained through the Level 1 coaching course. All nine clubs, after this year will have qualified Level 1 coaches.

Because the clubs don't have a pro it's the perfect way for the kids to get consistency of coaching.

### **What had been the situation with volunteer coaches at the clubs?**

Some of the clubs already had volunteer coaches but a lot of the clubs didn't know what the benefits of having clubgolf coaches.

I've recommended to all clubs to get involved with clubgolf, get some Level 1 volunteers and have a drive to attract juniors because it will increase their revenue. And it makes it legally sound, you can't be teaching kids without your Level 1.

Kirkcubright Golfers Association pay the clubs some money to fund my expenses.

For many clubs this will be their first batch of coaches. Four of the nine – Castle Douglas, Brighthouse Bay, New Galloway and Portpatrick – never had any Level 1 coaches.

I have rattled up about 20 for the training course in March (2009).

This year coaching will be weekly and more organised. It will be better structured at each club, easier and more productive.

### **How will the coaching work this year?**

The kids will get coaching weekly from the volunteer coaches and I'll go once a month, twice a month to some. I also help the Level 1 coaches with their organisation and planning and will be there to mentor and support them.

### **Kids won't have a huge amount of sports opportunities locally. How keen are they keen to play golf?**

The biggest sport is here probably curling and football but, because of the junior work that's happening in our clubs, golf is growing every year. The thing that made the most difference is going into the schools creating an interest and inviting them to the club.

### **What work are you doing in local schools?**

I started going around the local schools two years ago teaching Tri-Golf in after schools clubs. Now I go into every primary school in the area, that's 11 schools, and I work with over 1500 children.

I do a four week block in each school and hold a championship at the end, at Easter time, for the leading two from each school.

After the schools coaching I also invite all the kids to Portpatrick where I give them a free, skills test and they have the opportunity to join the club.

We have a Par 3 course, with holes ranging from 120 to 150 yards, which is ideal for teaching. I run clubgolf Stage 1, 2 and 3 coaching.

### **What do the kids think of golf?**

They love it. First clubgolf coaching in school is a great start for them because it's are so much fun. As long as you keep it as fun as possible you'll create interest. Keep changing and updating it and the kids will never get bored.

### **At what point does a clubgolf programme start bringing in revenue to the club?**

As soon as your first group of kids come up because they spend money in the bar, on food and drink, and buying equipment. And their parents come up and want to get involved, so it's a huge cycle. We offer children a free month where they can in and try golf and get coaching

from me and they don't have to pay a penny. At the end of the month they get the opportunity of joining the club.

After every academy session we get between three and five new members. So we are generating 20 to 30 new members every year through the clubgolf programme.

Everyone is getting a spin off from it. The numbers at the other local clubs are increasing as well from me going into the schools.

#### **How do you make junior coaching affordable?**

I held a fund raising dinner in March with Dean Robertson and Campbell Elliott from Haggs Castle which raised £4000. Amongst other things we are going to use to purchase junior equipment. Parents here can't necessarily afford for their kids to join a golf club and buy equipment. So I am going to purchase a whole load of equipment so kids don't have to have their own to come up.

#### **Will any of it be invested in performance players?**

We've got seven boys coming for coaching that are members of Stranraer and Portpatrick that are around the Stage 3 level. This month I'm starting to run the Stage 3 programme for the South of Scotland under 14 squad. The money from the dinner is going to enable boys from all the local clubs to play in national events through the summer and will improve the development of junior golf in the whole area.

#### **What did you think of Stage 3 Orientation?**

I did it two years ago and it was very helpful. Because I'd already done the Level 1 and 2 training, I found the format, the template and the programmes are very similar.

#### **What is the word amongst other Pros about Stage 3 Orientation?**

When they do the course a lot of Pros feel they have to do the coaching in a certain way. They feel they are going to be restricted to teaching a certain method. But after speaking with Spencer Henderson (SGU) I've set out my programme and it's quite flexible. You can add your own style to the course, you're certainly not teaching out of a book. I've added a lot of my own stuff in to the Stage 3 programme and it's working.

#### **Would you recommend Stage 3 to other Pros?**

I enjoyed it and I feel anything which involves you with junior golf is worth doing. That's the way you are going to increase your revenue in the future. Our golf club lost 65 full members last year, which is £17,000 so we believe the best way to generate that income is through junior golf. That's why we have got actively involved in clubgolf.

#### **Is the loss of this many members another blow from the credit crunch?**

It's more to do with average age. Our membership base is quite old and people get to the age where they can't manage to get round the golf course. It's not just something happening here, it's occurring in every golf club. The average age in most of our golf clubs here is 55 plus. The reason we are having a drive at junior golf is not just to increase junior numbers but also in the hope that the parents might become involved in our clubs. The Stranraer club over the road do an excellent Stage 1 and 2 course for their kids and I go in and do Stage 3, so the local clubs are all using the same hymn sheet.

#### **How about girls?**

We are going to run the girls in golf initiative. Our target is to get 25 girl members. So far we've got eight girl members that started last year. One of the volunteers we are sending to Level 1 training, Gillian Monteith, is just back from Brazil where she played the Nick Faldo series finals. She's going to run the girls training. She's well known in the area and will be a great inspiration to the girls.

### **The Results**

#### **The bottom line – how healthy is your junior membership?**

Our junior numbers have gone from 69 members 12 months ago when I got involved to 101.

### **The Future**

**What next?**

Less than seven percent of local school children are members of golf clubs. Our target in the next two years is to get another 10% involved – that’s another 200 active junior members.

**Ends**

