



## **EYEMOUTH JUNIOR SECTION TRANSFORMED IN JUST TWO YEARS**

When plans were made to extend Eyemouth harbour in the mid 1990s they included cutting through the golf Club's cliff top nine hole course.

What looked like being a disaster for local golf became a godsend when the Scottish Borders Council decided the solution was to compensate by creating a new 18-hole course and build a clubhouse from scratch.

Funded by Scottish Borders Enterprise, Scottish Sports Council lottery and the European Community, through the European Regional Development Fund, the new club opened in August 1997.

Michael Hackett worked in the Club's shop when it opened, to gain experience and develop his skills to enable him to have a career in the golf industry. After stints at Burntisland Golf Club and Dunbar Golf Club he qualified as a PGA Professional in 2004 and in January 2007 was back at Eyemouth as the club's first Club Professional.

A Professional with a modern and far sighted attitude, Michael (31) is passionate about bringing children into golf. Here he explains how he set about building the Club's junior section from scratch.

### **Challenges**

When I came here in January 2007, the junior section was poor and it worried me that we only had 12 junior members. Four played in club medals and they were teenagers that would soon become adults.

Juniors are the future of the game and the future of any golf club. If you don't have a thriving junior section you don't have future members coming through as adults. We had at least a five year gap before we could get other juniors coming through.

### **Solutions**

My priority was to get the junior section going, to set the ball rolling and get this club on the map. I wanted parents and kids to know that we were offering golf to every child in the area no matter what their age or ability.

I put forward the idea to the committee of giving the juniors free membership until they reached the age of 12. At the time we had six primary aged juniors paying £45 each for their annual membership. So the club would lose a small amount of revenue to start with but if it succeeded the way we expected it to we could easily get 50 juniors in to the club. They would be spending that amount in the clubhouse anyway.

The committee agreed to implement the free membership immediately. All the children needed to do was to pay £3 for their insurance which would cover them during the time they were at the golf club. From the beginning of the 2007 summer season they had free access to the course and all facilities seven days a week.

Up until this year my assistant Professional, Daniel Wood, a volunteer helper, Jim Martin, and I covered the junior coaching. At the beginning of this year, through clubgolf, we were awarded a grant of £350 to put one of our new members, Bob Holmes, through the Level 1 training course. We used the rest of the grant to improve our practice ground. We set up a target golf area, complete with a sand bunker and four greens, with proper holes and flag sticks, set at 50, 75, 100 and 150 yards.

With Bob passing his clubgolf Level 1 exams we can now offer coaching in three stages. Bob teaches the really young juniors the grip, the correct stance, the basics of the swing, health and safety and etiquette. I then take them on to Stage 2, to develop their golfing skills and prepare them for the golf course. Daniel and Jim then take them onto the golf course and play three or four holes with them to get them to the stage where they can start getting their first handicaps.

Our junior coaching takes place on Thursday evenings during the summer holidays and we charge each child £25 for the seven-week course. We also run a four week coaching course over the Easter holidays, which is £15 per child. We also run target golf in June, which is also four weeks of coaching for £15. This will continue for the 2010 Season.

Last year I coached children from Eyemouth High School that hadn't been interested in sport and were therefore not participating in any physical activity. The local primary schools are committed to delivering clubgolf's introductory game, firstclubgolf, which uses modified equipment and SNAG Velcro targets. When the High School staged its opening day in June we were asked to deliver a four hour session open to all of the children from the local schools.

## **Outcomes**

We have approximately 75 junior members now and we've achieved this in just over two years.

In that time we have offered over 50 hours of coaching, mainly delivered by Daniel, Jim and myself. Having Bob now trained as a clubgolf volunteer coach makes a huge difference and enables us to take the coaching onto the next level. If we didn't have a volunteer coach it would be impossible to coach the number of kids that we are now attracting to the Coaching Sessions.

Due to the coaching we should now have 30 to 40 kids aged between 9 and 11 all coming through together as active junior members of the club for the next five or six years. Hopefully after that we will have another group of kids coming through, which will put the club in a very strong position for the foreseeable future.

If we can get 80 of these children playing golf full time until they are 17 or 18, and if we can then get half of the children becoming adult members of the club it will have been well worthwhile. In the meantime the children and their families are all using the club for the social side and for meals. Although we provide equipment for the children, their parents generally buy them their own equipment through the Pro Shop once they become interested in the game.

Last year we were awarded a £10,000 grant through Awards for All which we invested into an indoor area, complete with a built in net and GASP LAB (Golf Analysis System for Professionals) teaching package and software. It has been a fantastic addition which has benefitted everybody that has used it.

We put it in primarily for the juniors so that we could keep teaching them through the winter months and the bad weather. It's a great advantage to show them their swings and the correct positions that they should be in during the golf swing. We had 22 children on our first introductory course in Easter and we logged all their swings on the computer. It's a reference point to show them their technique when they started playing, and it will be useful to show them in years to come.

### **What's next?**

Because we are making golf free to every child we have opened up new avenues to make the game accessible to everyone. Our catchment area is vast, and covers a radius of around 30 miles. There are lots of golf courses in the Borders yet only three of them have a Club Professional. We now have a great coaching set up here and we want to get the message out to as many parents and children as we can that they can play their golf here.

Having a qualified clubgolf volunteer coach is invaluable and we could do with another volunteer coach or two to deal with the numbers of children we are attracting. As coaches we all get a huge amount of enjoyment and satisfaction out of teaching children and we are working hard to recruit more volunteer coaches.

I will always push for the kids to receive free membership right up until they are 12 years old and start secondary education. It's the perfect age for them to start. If you can instil the fundamentals of golf and get them swinging the golf club correctly at an early age then they will have learnt the skills for life.

