

(sent to P&J, North Star, Northern Times, Nairnshire Gazette)

Tain Golf Club mothers come too

(picture attached – Tain Golf Club's ladies group, by Rob Hudson)

Tain Golf Club could potentially double its female membership as a result of its commitment to the national junior golf strategy, clubgolf.

Over 80 local children are developing their golfing abilities at Tain, making the Club one of the most successful in Scotland at delivering. But three years on from the club's adoption of the strategy, and two years since the opening of its new practice facility, there has been an unexpected but welcome development.

A group of mothers, who have made the regular run to drive their children to the Club for volunteer coach, Mike Sangster's sessions have decided to take up the game themselves.

"With all the kids coming, six or seven of the mothers said to Mike they were quite keen on learning themselves," said Tain Golf Club's Munro Ferries.

"The coaching started in April on a Thursday night and as soon as people saw Mike with the group the word got around and it just multiplied from there.

"The numbers had progressed to 30 and after our Texas Scramble we organised for them last week we have a few more, so he might have to create another lesson for them. It was completely unexpected - they are all newcomers and Mike has been running a separate section."

Mike Sangster, who along with his team of assistants, coaches clubgolf to children six days a week at the club, is as surprised as anybody else by the way the Ladies Session has taken off. He had originally hoped that around a dozen ladies would take up his coaching offer.

"For the first night 28 turned up, now we are getting about 33 on average a week and there are another half dozen that want to come along to the women's session," said Mr Sangster.

Initiatives that encourage more females to play the game are high on the clubgolf's agenda. There are 198,500 registered male club golfers in Scotland, but fewer than 50,000 females. In the under 18 level, there are 25,000 boys but just 2,700 girls. clubgolf's target is to double the number of girls playing by the year 2009.

Existing research generated in Sweden, long seen as one of the best exponents of encouraging girls into the sport, attributed the high number of its female players to balancing play with the social side of the sport. Mr Sangster is finding the same formula is working in Tain.

"It's amazing how it's taken off; you'd expect some to drop out after a while but nobody has pulled out yet," he said. "Every six sessions we will do a Texas Scramble and have a night out with them to make it interesting. I think that women prefer to learn in a group where they have the upper hand - fortunately I am pretty thick skinned!"

The Club, which has a current female membership of around 30 and is ever prepared to innovate, has taken the unprecedented step of creating a new 'Intermediate' membership to help encourage and absorb the new ladies group.

"At the recent AGM we created a new Intermediate membership for these ladies," said Mr Sangster. "It will allow them to get involved for a year, play off the junior tees and use the practice areas. Hopefully they will get a feel until they are ready to play the whole course and take up full membership.

"Tain must be one of the first Golf Clubs in Scotland to do this and at least a dozen have already said they will take up this offer. We have around thirty lady members at present so potentially we could double our female membership."

Due to the large numbers of children attending clubgolf coaching sessions throughout the week, Tain Golf Club has drawn up plans to extend its practice area and create a new green with bunkers and a second practice putting green. With junior numbers continuing to grow each year and with more adults joining this has become a priority. These plans have been approved by the Committee and are hoped to be in operation for next season.

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- clubgolf is a partnership between the Scottish Golf Union, the Scottish Ladies' Golfing Association, the Professional Golfers' Association, the Golf Foundation and sportscotland. The strategy has been developed as a direct result of the Scottish Executive's commitment to introduce every nine-year-old child in Scotland to the game by 2009.

- clubgolf is funded by the Scottish Executive which has committed £500,000 per year to the scheme through sportscotland until 2009.

- As Scotland's national junior golf strategy, clubgolf is backed by Scotland's most famous golfers, Paul Lawrie, Sandy Lyle, Catriona Matthew, Colin Montgomerie, and Scotland's First Minister, Jack McConnell, MSP and Sports Minister, Patricia Ferguson, MSP. It aims to provide new opportunities in the game for every child in the country and to increase participation in the sport by adopting a totally new approach to the development of junior golf.

- clubgolf has been introduced at a point where, of the 260,000 members in the 580 clubs north of the border, the average age is between 42 and 44 years old. This figure is likely to rise in line with the demographic trend of an ageing Scottish population. Although memberships have grown at a rate of just under five percent during the past decade, there has been an increase of almost 20 percent in the number of courses built over the same period.

- Clubs across Scotland are playing a vital role in the clubgolf strategy. Following the six-week firstclubgolf course, children have the opportunity to progress to the second phase of clubgolf's Player Pathway, Stage 1. Hosted by their local clubs, Stage 1 is a 23-hour course, covering the fundamentals of putting, chipping, full swing, rules and etiquette, taught by the club's fully trained volunteer coaches. After Stage 1 there are a further four stages on the Player Pathway.

clubgolf's targets for 2009 are:

- 50,000 9 year olds introduced to clubgolf every year through firstclubgolf
- 50,000 9-14 year olds retained in the clubgolf programme at any one time
- 20,000 9-14 year olds experiencing golf in a community golf programme setting
- 200 clubgolf centres (golf clubs and community linked centres delivering some of the above)
- 20 junior clubgolf facilities (new clubgolf facilities)
- 40 affiliated junior golf facilities (driving ranges/practice facilities utilising the clubgolf brand)

- Ends -

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