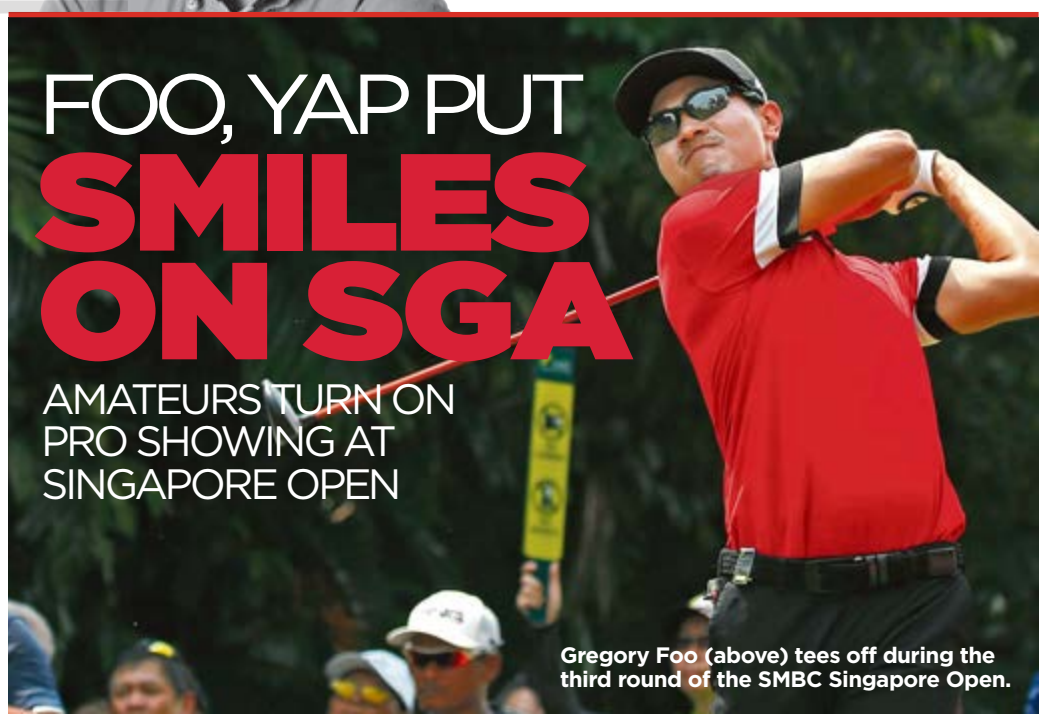
BY GODFREY ROBERT

FOO, YAP PUT SMILES ON SGA

AMATEURS TURN ON PRO SHOWING AT SINGAPORE OPEN



Gregory Foo (above) tees off during the third round of the SMBC Singapore Open.

In many situations, a 50 per cent strike rate is, at best, a notch above mediocrity. But when two out of four Singapore amateurs made the cut at last week's US$1 million ($1.32m) SMBC Singapore Open from a field of 156 golfers (151 of them professionals) at Sentosa's Serapong course, there is reason to celebrate.

In fact, Gregory Foo (tied 16th) and Jesse Yap (tied 33rd) not only finished in creditable final positions, they also ranked above some of the biggest names in golf, such as Louis Oosthuizen, Arjun Atwal and Thaworn Wiratchant in the national Open which also dumped previous winners Prayad Marksaeng (defending champion), Jeev Milkha Singh, Song Young Han and Zaw Moe out of weekend play.

Singapore Golf Association (SGA) officials were beaming with delight after last Sunday's fourth round because Foo and Yap's performances were the results of a tough comprehensive programme that the association had implemented for just over a year.

Since being elected a year-and-a-half ago, the SGA's committed duo of president Ross Tan and Junior Development Sub-committee chairman Lyn Sen had brainstormed with their committee and club hierarchy to work out a programme that allowed golfers such as Foo, Yap, Marc Ong, Joshua Shou and Joshua Ho to make sizeable leaps in their overall game.

The biggest reward was the Southeast Asian Games team gold last year in Kuala Lumpur which came after a lengthy lapse of 28 years (Samson Gimson won the individual gold in 1989).

The SGA had worked with clubs such as Sentosa, Warren, Singapore Island Country Club and Raffles to allow the amateurs playing time and with the help of former national coach Andrew Welsford and high performance manager Jerome Ng honed their game with regular routine game drills and gym work.

And Sentosa chipped in greatly by opening up the Serapong course – thanks to Sen and Director of Golf Nicole Thew – to the players for practice not only for the Singapore Open but also all year round.

Speaking on behalf of the players, Foo, 24, who played four great rounds to finish on four-under 280, said: "The familiarity of the course certainly helped us. As you are aware, Serapong can be a challenging layout, but if you know where to place your shots, you will be rewarded."

Foo, who made a total of 114 putts over four days (winner Sergio Garcia had 126 putts) and thrice birdied the finishing hole, added: "The greens can be tricky, but I read the lines quite well."

However, the SGA is left with a transition period with Ong, Shou and Yap turning pro in a year where it has to field teams for the Asian Amateur Championships, Eisenhower Trophy and the Asian Games.

#KEEPITGREEN, LIKE SENTOSA

Gavin Green launches Sentosa Golf Club's #KeepItGreen Campaign at SMBC Singapore Open.

During the recently concluded SMBC Singapore Open, Sentosa Golf Club took the opportunity to promote a campaign on encouraging junior golf as well as sustainable practices within the game called #KeepItGreen.

In conjunction with the Singapore Golf Association, the club donated a free round of golf to local youngsters for every 'Green in Regulation' that Asian Tour No.1, Gavin Green, hit throughout the week.

On-route to a tied-eighth finish, the Malaysian totalled 52 greens hit, meaning the club will donate the same number of rounds to the juniors over the next 12 months.

With the imminent hosting of the inaugural Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship from February 21-24, and the Men's Asia-Pacific Amateur in October, the club has already opened its doors to local amateurs hoping to qualify for either tournament.

Green's efforts will now give more opportunities on top of that.

Also prominent during the week, the club's general manager and director of agronomy, Andrew Johnston, spoke to the Asian Golf Industry Federation summit on Sentosa's approach to sustainability, particularly touching on the 'green' approach towards building the New Tanjong course.

"We as a club have made a conscious effort over the past few years to really improve our methods when it comes to looking after the environment," said Johnston.

The #KeepItGreen message was reinforced with a video starring celebrated golfers like Masters and now Singapore Open champion Sergio Garcia, 2010 Open champion Louis Oousthuizen and Green.

Viewed by 166,000 people at last count, it can be seen at www.facebook.com/SentosaGolfClub.

DISCOVER GOLF CARNIVAL A MAJOR HIT

The involvement of golfing juniors at the annual SMBC Singapore Open has become a significant feature.

And events that attract the juniors are the Beat The Pro Contest on the par-three hole two at Serapong, the Arc Children's Centre fundraising project that takes in a chipping contest and the putting challenge at The Village.

A highlight at this year's national Open was the Discover Golf Carnival on the first Sunday of the tournament week which drew more than 600 kids and 2,000 people (many parents) who experienced the venue in tournament set-up.

This was a huge success as the carnival attracted multi-tier families to an event that was overflowing with activities.

The event, jointly organised by the SGA Junior Development sub-committee, Sentosa Golf Club and promoter Lagardere Sports, saw enthusiastic kids trying their hands on every aspect of the game.

And the turnout enjoyed free popcorn, cotton candy and ice-cream while also vying for goodies and prizes.

The major partners and sponsors, TaylorMade, Crestlink, Totts Golf and Prudential, were generous with their support and vowed to come back next year.

Fun for the kids (above, left) and the adults (left).

photos by EPA (top); Lagardere Sports