

LYN MAKES SEN-SE OF AGE-GROUP GOLF

ake the bull by its horns. The Singapore Golf Association is steeling itself to do just that in the face of a biting backlash whipped up by the closure of some local golf clubs in the next five years.

With Raffles Country Club going (next year), Keppel Club also going (in 2021) and Jurong Country Club gone (last December), the imminent danger facing local golf is a reduction of the playing population.

From a high of almost 100,000 golfers in the Nineties, it is said that by next year, Singapore will be lucky to have slightly more than half that number of golfers.

But for the SGA that is not a death knell for the game, but a situation from which it hopes to promote junior golf (the catchment being primary school children), capitalising on the easier availability of golf courses in the light of smaller playing numbers.

For that to materialise, the SGA needs the backing of the clubs, many of whom have signalled that they would also put the shoulders to the wheel for a common cause with the re-energised SGA.

Heading the versatile junior de-

velopment committee is the dynamic Lyn Sen, now a leading administrator and once a top amateur and SICC champion.

Since taking on an active role off the course, as chairman of the Junior Development Committee, also a key official of the Singapore Ladies Golf Association and now the ladies' captain of Sentosa Golf Club, Lyn has been doing her rounds to ensure that game remains active among the juniors.

Last Thursday, she shuttled from home to Sembawang Country Club, then to Raffles Country Club before winding down at SICC to tie up some loose ends of her committed committee's ambitious programme.

And in an interview at SICC's Thomson location, she said: "We have drawn up an exciting programme for the juniors, even those below 12, which deserves strong support from the clubs and driving ranges.

"It's all about tournaments, tournaments and talent scouting camps. The first event is an Under-14 tournament on Feb 20 at Raffles, followed by one on March 11 at the SICC. Then it is a three-day talent scouting camp at SICC from March 13 to 15.

"In fact, we are planning to have at least one competition every month to keep the kids busy and interested in golf."

Lyn hopes to circumvent the problem of studies, by having these events during the weekdays, with the competitions restricted to nine holes, as time would be major factor for the school-going kids.

With fewer schools now offering golf as an extra-curricular activity and the Singapore Sports School's dropping of the sport from its core list, Lyn and her committee have their work cut out to enhance golf's image in Singapore.



SGA Junior Development Committee members (from left) Alvin Lee, Lyn Sen, Nicole Thew and Sammuel Sim.

Junior golf in Singapore is somewhat fragmented with the youngsters having varied coaches and training at different venues.

The SGA is not going change that as it believes that there is some merit in this diversity. Having said that, the SGA is also keen to have a centralised programme that would engender competition and camaraderie.

So it is looking at hiring a national coach who would continue to leave the juniors with their respective coaches, but occasionally bring the elite players together to foster national spirit, bonding and teamwork.

There is also a greater mission

to this: to produce a champion who could participate in the 2018 British Junior Open at St Andrews in Scotland.

And from that platform, the SGA intends to find a qualifier for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo with the cooperation of the Singapore Professional Golfers' Association.

Lyn concludes: "It is a chicken-and-egg situation. Only if we can produce top-quality players can we lure more good sponsors. We have rounded up some generous sponsors, but the pool needs to be enlarged. Only through sponsorship can we run more and better programmes."

FERNANDEZ SIBLINGS ON COURSE FOR BIG THINGS

What started out as fun golf for the Fernandez family at Bishan Driving Range is now serious business for the three children.

Residing just about a bus stop away from the (now-closed) range, dad Ignasius decided that golf would be a good sporting activity for his three children, Fabian (16 this weekend), Margaret (14 on Jan 26) and Anne, 10.

So the 55-year-old maritime industry worker, who modestly admits that he has been a 24-handicapper since the time he obtained his handicap 20 years ago, often took his three children for hit-outs at the range.

A chance observance of his children's precocious talents by the range's professional, Australian Andrew Morrow, in 2010, was the trigger for Fabian, Margaret and Anne to pursue golf.

The 1.71-metre tall Fabian, a Secondary Four student at Whitley, has a two-handicap index (HI), Margaret (1.57m), a Secondary Two student also at Whitley, has an impressive 0.4 HI and Anne (1.63m), a Primary Five pupil at Marymount Con-



(From left) Margaret, Anne and Fabian.

vent, is armed with a 0.3 HI.

And the road to those mighty handicap leaps within six years came about when, after one year in the game, the trio came

under the wings of the renowned Australian teaching pro Greg Anketell, who is based at Keppel Club.

No doubt, it is a tough schedule for the three, balancing studies and golf. But being together and playing golf as a family – sometimes with Ignasius – help.

All three try and do their homework during free time at school, and train most evenings on weekdays between 4pm and 6.30pm at the Singapore Island Country Club on their own, working on their drives, woods, long irons, chipping and then putting.

It helps that the meticulous Fabian often organises the lunches and then calls for the cab to ferry them to the SICC Island location.

Little wonder that both girls look up to Fabian as the one who inspires them most.

On Saturdays, they have a vigorous session under Anketell at Keppel, beginning with a morning run at 7am, body conditioning through fitness workouts and the chipping and putting lessons for an hour.

The two sisters recently did them-

selves and Singapore proud by finishing first and second in their respective age-groups at the 2017 Victorian Junior Masters in Australia. Margaret was runner-up in the Under-14 category while Anne stunned the field with her victory by 51 shots in the Under-12 category.

With the strong backing of their parents (mum is Vanderlyn), who have gone out of their way to ensure that golf is their priority as they pay particular attention to their range work and regular course-play, the Fernandez siblings are on the right track to pursue their dream of making golf their career.

Although three years apart, Margaret and Anne have many things in common. They have a 210-metre average drive, admire Canadian Brooke Henderson as their idol golfer and do not see any particular strength or weakness in their games, often believing that they can improve their golf.

When asked separately if they would make golf their career, their replies were also identical. It was a bright-eyed "Definitely."

photo courtesy of SGA (top), photo by Phyllicia Wang