



BY
GODFREY ROBERT

DISCOVER GOLF IS THE WAY TO KEEP THE GAME BUZZING

SGA WILL HOLD ITS THIRD SUCH CARNIVAL DURING SMBC S'PORE OPEN WEEK

about five years ago, the sport of golf, which is said

to be one of the oldest pastimes, suffered an “identity crisis”. Golf, which is said to have had its origins in Scotland in the Middle Ages, hit a rough patch when a series of happenings gave it a body blow. The number of golf courses was dwindling, with closures in parts of the United States and Europe and land acquisition by the government in China.

The biggest name in world golf then, Tiger Woods, ruined the sport and his own image when he suffered from knee and back injuries and endured a traumatic personal life with his marital problems and romantic affairs.

That double blow led to millennials shunning the sport, leading to a big drop in the golf playing population globally.

Singapore was not spared either. In the last three years, the island lost clubs (Jurong Country Club and Raffles Country Club) and three courses.

And now there is speculation that more courses face the doom with land leases expiring and the Government's intention to turn golf land into areas for industrial development.

It is also said that Singapore's golf playing population has aged and the number has dropped from a high of 90,000 to about 70,000 with fewer youngsters taking up the game.

However, the golf administrators here and abroad are not taking that setback sitting down, and one of

the biggest projects they have been working on is the programme aptly named Discover Golf.

Its game plan is to inject fun into the game with the long term prospect of even reducing the number of playing hours for the game by encouraging nine-and 12-hole events.

The Singapore Golf Association has also taken up the cudgels and has organised its own Discover Golf Carnivals.

And although in its two previous carnivals, there have been a reasonable number of children who have taken up the game, the SGA feels that there is still much work to do.

In partnership with event promoter Lagardere Sports, it will hold its third such carnival in conjunction with the SMBC Singapore Open on Jan 13.

Encouraged by the response at the previous one held at the upgraded Executive Course in Mandai on Sept 23, the carnival will again have many golf-themed activities for the public to get them excited and inducted to the game.



The best way to enjoy golf is to see it as a fun event, as seen in the Discover Golf events (right).

There will be a Kids Zone where the younger ones can get to try activities and win prizes.

There will also be a skills challenge area aimed at individuals who are more proficient in the game.

Held during the week of the Singapore Open, the event will be held at the Lower-Tier Driving Range at Sentosa Golf Club from 2pm to 6pm and admission is free.

There will also be a SGA Long Drive Challenge where golfers get to try out their tee-shots and be crowned the first ever Long Drive champion in Singapore.

This competition is open to all amateur players, and participants will compete in one of four divisions, Men's Open, Women's Open, Boys' (amateurs aged 18 and under as of Jan 1, 2019) and Girls' (amateurs aged 18 and under as of Jan 1, 2019).

The participants will go through the qualifying rounds and the top five longest-hitters in each division will enter the final round.

Also held at Sentosa's Lower-Tier Driving Range, there will be an entry fee of \$10 per try (limited to two tries per person) for this challenge.

IN SEARCH OF A LOCAL WINNER FOR SINGAPORE OPEN

Every year when golf's Singapore Open comes to town, local golf is so burdened that the national association feels like an albatross is hanging around its neck.

For no Singaporean has ever won the title, with the competition dating back to the heady days of 1961 with its inauguration.

The best local finisher was M. Murugiah, who finished fourth in 1995 in the event won by Australian Steve Conran at the SICC's Bukit course.

Of course, the challenge has become

bolder and tighter as the entrants these days – unlike the days of yore when most of the players came from Asia and Australasia – are world-class players such as Jordan Spieth, Sergio Garcia, Adam Scott, Davis Love and the likes.

Yet the Singapore Golf Association is catching the bull by its horns by doing all it can in search of a national hero.

And the first thing the SGA did was to allow all local qualifiers for the 2019 SMBC Singapore Open free access to train at Sentosa's highly-recognised

tough Serapong course from Dec 1, so that they can familiarise themselves with the course and know the terrain better.

And the association also managed to secure an additional spot for rookie professional Gregory Foo (above), who will be competing for the first time as a professional after a magnificent perfor-



mance last year as an amateur, finishing joint-16th against a top-class field.

Joining Foo are Quincy Quek, Johnson Poh, Jesse Yap, Mitchell Slorach, Choo Tze Huang and Koh Dengshan (with SPGA spots) and the evergreen Mardan Mamat, now a senior at 51 (on an Asian Tour career money ranking).

Three amateurs, Joshua Ho, Lucius Toh and James Leow, complete the local list of entries for the 53rd Singapore Open from Jan 17 to 20.

— Godfrey Robert

photos courtesy of Lagardere Sports, Singapore Golf Association