

# For the love of golf

Old Tom's spirit can breathe new life into our family game,  
write Harry Yeates and Peter Gardiner-Hill.

For the first 200 and more years of our great game, the leading amateur and professional players of the day collaborated in the development of 'The Spirit of Golf'. But what exactly does this phrase mean? Our research over the last months has failed to uncover any proper explanation so we thought we would start this article with our own definition (see box at bottom of page).

We also feel there is a case for adding to The Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society's great mantra 'Serious Fun' the words 'The Family Game for a Healthy Life'.

In our previous three articles we have discussed different aspects of 'The Spirit of Golf', including its great promoters such as John Ball and Francis Ouimet and the challenges it faces such as 'going open' and 'The Match' (that betting-dominated spectacle in Las Vegas involving Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson). Now it is time to consider how our great game can maintain its appeal in the modern era, and what pitfalls lie ahead.

Several recent initiatives by The R&A and other organisations happily demonstrate that the 'Serious Fun' concept is alive and well.

These include the brilliantly successful Club 9 Hole Open Championship, the St Andrews Junior Golf Club, new types of membership categories at golf clubs that are accessible and flexible, and the creation of various Family Hill-Putting Courses, including 'The Limalayas' at the Lima Golf Club in Peru.

Another exciting concept, being tabled by the St Andrews Ladies Putting Club, is a Family Putting Competition on the Himalayas for teams from all the clubs in St Andrews, and eventually for other invitees. We hope this will encourage other clubs to install their own Hill-Putting courses as has already happened, for example, at Royal Adelaide.

The R&A continues to invest huge sums in the development of the game worldwide, bookmarked by the quadrennial International Golf Conference and a biannual industry forum, but we would argue that there needs to be a regular meeting between the leading executives of the professional game and amateur representatives specifically to promote Amateurism and The Spirit of Golf.

All those involved in golf, after all, need to facilitate its healthy growth. Amateur bodies may be responsible for the majority of golfers, but the members of the PGAs on both sides

### 'The Spirit of Golf' defined

'The Spirit of Golf is a passion for the game, personalised by keen competition, camaraderie, a family ethos, honesty, integrity and modesty, and above all good humour, health and sportsmanship'.

of the Atlantic not only have the task of teaching people to play the game but also have the duty of encouraging them to enjoy it more. The Tour players are effectively the shop window, attracting new players to the sport. The Tour's continuing success, indeed, depends on amateur bodies and professional teachers stoking this interest.

The National Golf Unions, of course, are a big part of this in the UK and provide coaching sessions for the top amateurs. Here, talented young players not only learn the basic essentials of the golf swing but how to manage relationships with the press, speak in public and consider career choices outside the professional tour. Thanks to the guidance of the Unions many of these 'elite' amateurs become tour executives, club secretaries, course managers, greenkeepers and equipment manufacturers. The main aim is that they become patrons of the sport.

When talking to these leading amateurs, however, we often hear that 'there is nothing worthwhile to play in' and that this is an obstacle to their continued participation in golf. We believe therefore that there should be collaboration between club professionals, the national unions and university teams to create more competitions so as to keep this group motivated and involved. Doing so will pay dividends for the whole golfing world. These individuals, after all, are likely to be the ones who volunteer to run junior



Coming to a club near you - Families putting on the Himalayas at St Andrews

sections, administer competitions and sit on committees. They are needed to help inspire the next generation. Is it right to expect a disaffected player to try to promote the glories of the game when they aren't getting satisfaction out of it themselves?

It is reassuring to note that one of the R&A's strategic priorities this year is to 'preserve amateur golf and develop a robust environment for elite amateur golf including world class championships and strong links to education'. Important objectives here include improving the quality of events

and enhancing the coverage they receive. Unfortunately there is no longer much scope for top amateurs to compete with professionals as there was, for example, in the 1950s and 60s when the Walker Cup team had a regular match against those who played in the Ryder Cup. Such encounters provided the opportunity for discussion and an exchange of views on the game - but they have fallen victim to the widening divide between the amateur and professional game. It has become increasingly difficult for amateurs to appear on the Professional Tours.

Over the last months we have listened to a number of great suggestions to help promote a new dialogue. Some have really stood out, notably the idea of a Pro-Am 9 hole foursomes competition to be played at the same time as the International Golf Conference. Perhaps there should also be a golfing careers fair for those wanting to make a living in the game, something that

would complement the training work of the National Unions. If hosted by the R&A, it could further promote St Andrews as a tourist destination.

Our 'Serious' hope is that these and other projects will focus more attention on the strategic policy of The R&A to take responsibility for the development of amateur golf. The 'Fun' part will be to hear more suggestions from *Golf Quarterly* readers on any local plans for enhancing the enjoyment of the game.

**Peter Gardiner-Hill has been Captain and President of Rye Golf Club and of the Oxford & Cambridge Golfing Society. He is also senior past captain of the R&A and 70 years a member.**

**Harry Yeates is Peter's grandson, a Rye member and a past captain of golf at King's, Canterbury.**

### 'The Spirit of Golf' in Action

As part of Rye's 125th anniversary celebrations and to mark the club's significance in Amateur Golf there will be a quadrangular match in early September involving the R&A, the Oxford & Cambridge Golfing Society, and the San Francisco Golf Club, home club of the late Sandy Tatum.