

The revival of the

Harry Yeates and Peter Gardiner-Hill conclude their series, arguing that it's time to re-unite the amateur and professional games.

What a feast of golf we were treated to in 2019! An Irishman won an Open Championship on the island of Ireland, a 20-year-old smiled her way to victory at the Women's Open, and in the amateur game there were some notable and auspicious new events.

In her D-day anniversary speech in June the Queen quoted her father in speaking of the need for a 'revival of spirit, a new unconquerable resolve', and this certainly resonated with the way we have been feeling about golf. Thankfully, the game has answered.

In articles published in issues 28, 29, 30 and 31 of *Golf Quarterly* we invoked the Oxford and Cambridge Golf Society mantra of 'Serious Fun' in an effort to reignite the Spirit of Golf and find inspiration from some of its great historical protagonists. Now we have some wonderful modern examples!

The BBC's Iain Carter said it best in talking about the Open: 'This was the biggest and best golfing party I have ever attended. Not just for the craic and atmosphere, which were magnificent, but for the golf course, which is simply stunning.'

Shane Lowry wasn't the only winner in Portrush last July. When asked about the legacy of the 148th Championship Rory McIlroy instinctively went beyond golf: 'The biggest impact this tournament has outside of sport, outside of everything else, is the fact that people are coming here to enjoy it and have a good time and forget everything

else that goes on.' Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke, the other championship-winning Ulstermen in the field, observed frequently how far the country had come and how unthinkable an Open on Irish soil would have been 20 years ago.

In an interview with Radio 5 Live during the Championship Martin Slumbers, the chief executive of the R&A, pointed to the wider significance of the Open as the main fundraiser for reinvesting in golf. He also explained that expanding the women's game is one of the R&A's top priorities.

Hinako Shibuno's victory in the Women's Open at Woburn provided the perfect advert for that. The 20-year-old Tour rookie smiled with every stroke, laughing her way to a first major championship. For us this was 'the Spirit of Golf' in action, demonstrating how much fun the game can be.

The same message came through loud and clear last year during a long-planned visit to Scotland by a team of Japanese universities ladies. The story started in 1986 when a team of lady students from St Andrews University played a series of matches in Japan against Japanese universities and were hospitably entertained wherever they went. The idea of a series of return matches on Scottish soil lay dormant for many years but finally became a reality last September. The travelling party included one of the original members of the 1986 Japanese team, while the entire St Andrews touring party of 33 years ago turned out to welcome their old friends. Played over

spirit of golf



Serious fun at St Andrews: the Japanese students on tour.



Smiles all round at the Quadrangular: R&A captain Chris Hilton presents Rye captain Sam Rajaratnam with a silver and gold salver to celebrate the East Sussex club's 125th anniversary.

various St Andrews courses, the Japanese visit was a shining example of the joys of both overseas touring and of team competition.

The recent Quadrangular Match played at Rye between the Oxford & Cambridge Golfing Society, the San Francisco Golf Club, The R&A and Rye was another case in point. Conceived in the spirit of 'Serious

Fun' and with foursomes match play at its heart, it fully lived up to expectations and offered a blueprint for the game for the American side to take home and propagate.

Our hope is to encourage American golf clubs to introduce more such fixtures into their calendars, building on initiatives like the San Francisco Golf Club's annual British

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Day of Golf. This came into being following the 1978 O&CGS tour of the US West Coast and is now the club’s most popular day of their year.

For the Spirit of Golf to evolve, however, we believe more needs to be done to bridge the divide between the amateur and the professional game.

During the second half of the 19th century the close working relationship between the leaders of the R&A and top professionals led to a mutual understanding of the sort of behaviour expected amongst golfers. This ‘code of conduct’ was widely recognised and respected. At that stage it was always clear that professionals were reliant on amateurs for their livelihood. There was a unity in golf between amateurs and professionals that doesn’t seem to exist today.

One way to close the gap would be for the R&A to elect a new group of professional Honorary Members, including younger, still active and well respected players. Our hope would be that these Honorary Members would be invited to a welcome meeting with an R&A panel and that their help would be enlisted on selected aspects of the Club’s governance work such as The Rules of Amateur Status (and while they’re at it, why not the Rules of Professional Status too), slow play, and in-play betting. Most significantly they could play a part in intensifying the focus on the amateur game.

In parallel with the money pouring into the professional tours, the R&A could set up a fund dedicated to the development and promotion of the Amateur Game. Individual players and the Professional bodies might be encouraged to transfer a proportion of

their earnings as an acknowledgement of their dependence for their reputations and livelihood on the 99% of golfers who are not professionals. In a nod to the ‘Serious Fun’ mantra of John Low and the O&CGS, this could be called the Serious FunD!

The Angela Uzielli Fund is a great example of what we had in mind. It gives young lady golfers sufficient means to continue playing the sport they love through college and university. The description is beautifully worded on the Kent Sport website: ‘By providing this support, we create ‘champions’ not only on the golf course but in society; to foster a life-long sporting habit and to allow young people to develop life skills closely associated with the game including confidence, self-esteem and integrity.’

With the fair wind blowing from Portrush and other events in 2019, we believe now is the perfect time to implement these plans and bring professionals and amateurs together to grow golf at all levels. We need to unite the governors of the game with the leaders of the golf industry to re-establish amateurism as the foundation of the global sport.

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.