

R&A

Developing Golf.

Sharing best practice for the benefit of the sport

VOL 2, ISSUE
Four



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Just Swing

How our Roblox game is
introducing golf to a new, young audience

“I actually wasn't aware of how good golf is for me. Everything The R&A have been doing around health and fitness is music to my ears”

**– Jonathan Edwards,
Global Development
Ambassador for The R&A**

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About Developing Golf magazine

Developing Golf magazine is a key element of the golf development alliance we are creating with affiliates globally to share best practice. This alliance also includes a new R&A Portal, increased funding support and consulting with affiliates on the ground across the year to develop the strongest activation plans, supported by R&A-created global assets.

Phil Anderton, Chief Development Officer – The R&A



'Just Swing': Roblox golf adventure comes to life at the AIG Women's Open.

The R&A has partnered with The Gang to deliver a Roblox golf adventure to appeal to young gamers





'Just Swing', a new virtual golf experience on Roblox, captured the imagination of a new generation of golf fans at the AIG Women's Open.

Designed to reach fresh, diverse audiences and drive engagement and participation in the sport, 'Just Swing' proved a hit at St Andrews.

The initiative comes from a partnership between The R&A and The Gang, a full-service gaming studio building best-in-class branded immersive activations.

Fraser Sturgess, CRM Project Assistant at The R&A, was at the home of golf, where the Roblox adventure was available to play in the Festival Village.

"We had a container set up there with 'Just Swing' branding and all the characters," he explained. "There were two iPads linked to screens, so you could see the game being played.

"Kids would come and play two holes with the aim of trying to get the best score, and we had free giveaways of Roblox-branded things like hats, bags and sunglasses. The overall winner received a signed pin flag from Lydia Ko.

"It was a really good opportunity for people to come along and try the game and see if they liked it."

It was a popular attraction throughout the week, drawing in visitors of all ages - underlining the pulling power of Roblox - and those who played the game were impressed.

"It was amazing to see the power of the Roblox brand," said Sturgess. "Kids just gravitate towards it, and video games are such a big part of the world they live in.

"On the Saturday in particular it was so busy

What is Roblox?

Roblox is a platform that allows users to create and play their own games. With 77 million daily users, it boasts more than 40 million games.



“It was amazing to see the power of the Roblox brand”

JUST SWING - ROBLOX



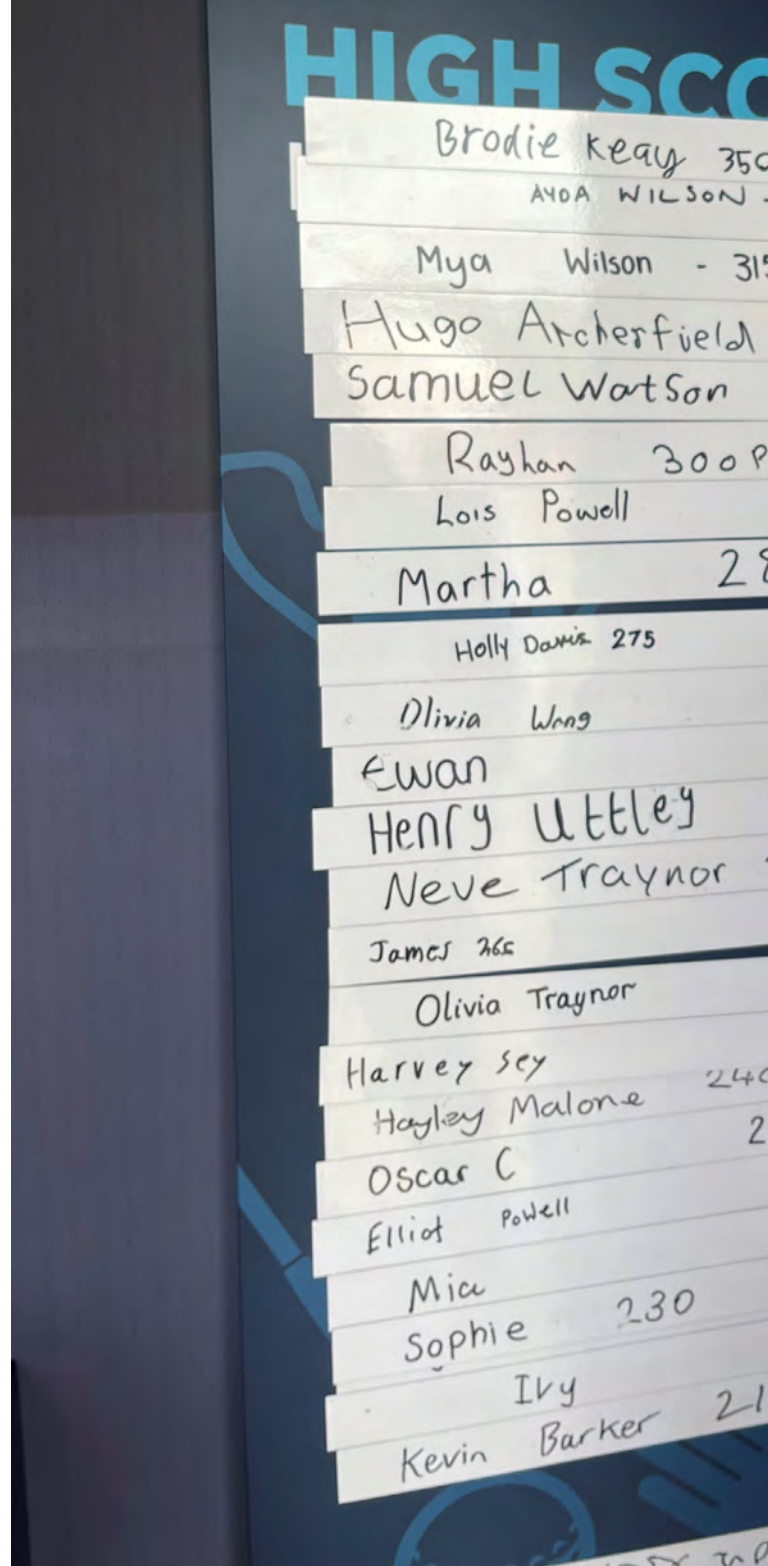
'Accessible and engaging'

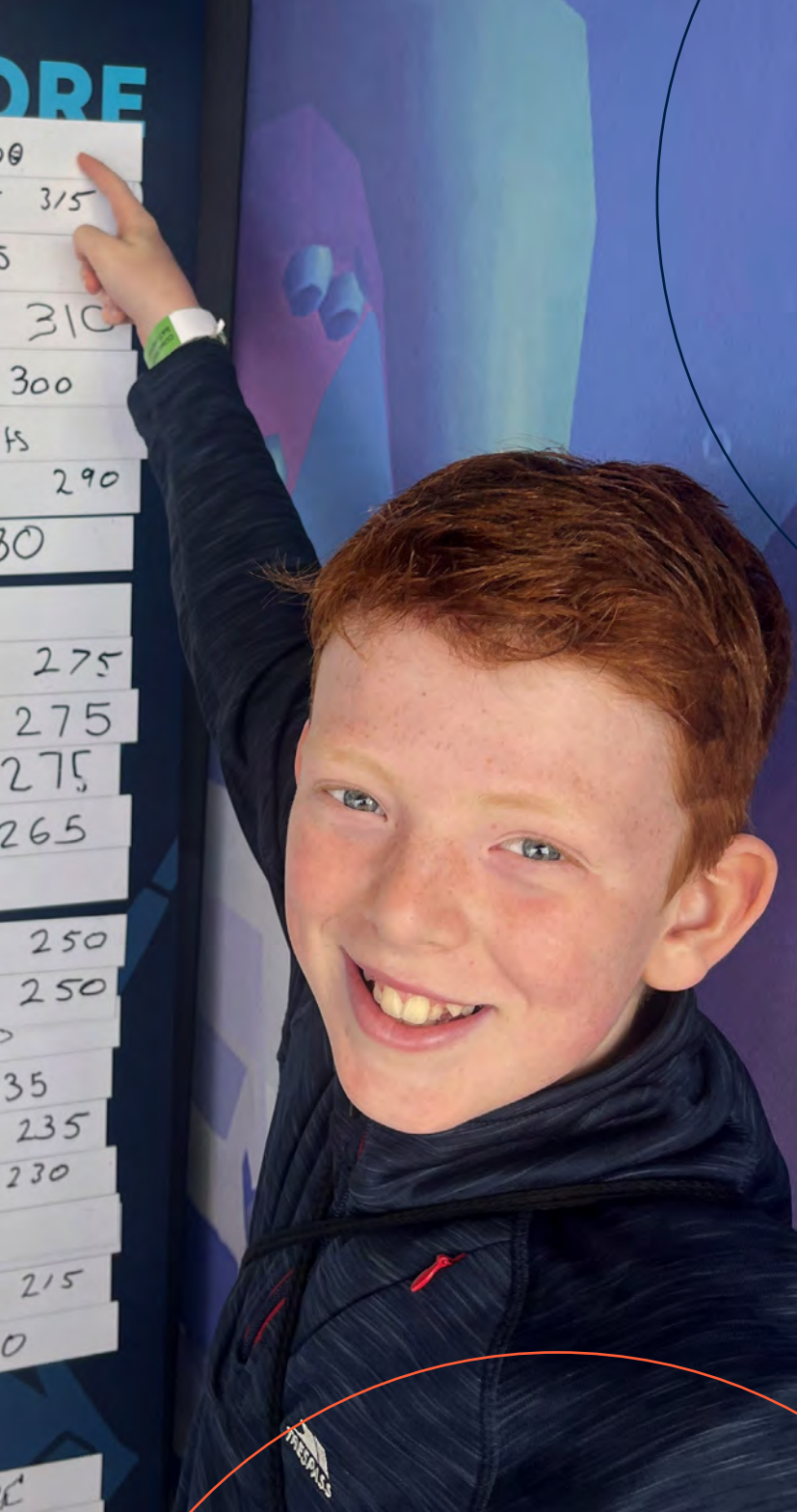
The R&A's Chief Development Officer, Phil Anderton, "The development of 'Just Swing' on Roblox presents a unique opportunity to share the joy of golf with a new, diverse audience on a global platform. Our collaboration with The Gang allows us to offer an accessible and engaging entry point to the sport for people of all ages."

– there were long queues for four to five hours straight.

"The feedback we had was really positive, and everyone seemed to pick it up really easily and enjoyed playing it."

The ongoing collaboration with The Gang includes an Active Play initiative incorporated in 'Just Swing', which is due to launch later this year. Players will complete challenges to earn codes, which they can redeem to access physical golf activities near them – a critical aspect for The R&A to inspire golf participation. ●





How 'Just Swing' works

Players are introduced into the experience via the Club Hub, a bright and interactive version of a traditional golf clubhouse, before competing in a nine-hole adventure featuring challenging holes, alongside more fantastical settings.

Participants can tee off in a magical underwater realm with coral and giant oysters or take their swings amid a Wild West desert landscape, complete with cacti, sand dunes and cowboys.

At the start of each round, players will be transported to three randomly selected holes to play in a wide range of fun challenges. Players must strategically navigate or utilise in-game obstacles, such as explosive barrels that propel the user's golf ball when hit or pinball-style bouncers that deflect the ball in unpredictable directions.

As players engage in daily challenges, they seek to improve their ranking and earn in-game currency. This virtual wealth can be exchanged at the virtual Pro Shop for exclusive user-generated content (UGC) items, including new golf clubs, attire and accessories, all designed to enhance their performance on the course.

The Club Hub also serves as an area where players can track and compare their scores on a modern, interactive leaderboard. Additionally, a Q&A section within the hub offers players the chance to earn extra currency and deepen their knowledge of golf.



Jonathan Edwards d benefits in new R&A

The triple jump world record holder has taken a leap into the world of

“Golf has become much more athletic rather than purely skill-based”



Driving golf's health role.

golf as a Global Development Ambassador for The R&A





Edwards with young golfers at The R&A Swingzone at The 152nd Open at Royal Troon

Jonathan Edwards previously had a passion for sand. Now he looks to avoid it.

Having enjoyed a glittering career as an athlete, the 58-year-old triple jump world record holder has taken his spikes to the fairways – and is simply relishing the sport.

Edwards, a CBE, needs little introduction. Having leapt to a mammoth mark of 18.29m at the 1995 Gothenburg World Championships, Edwards has held the World Record ever since. He is an Olympic, double World, European, European indoor and Commonwealth champion. Well-known in British sporting circles from a distinguished career, he was a member of the London 2012 Olympic organising committee and has been a regular athletics commentator and presenter.

Yet, there is little that now gives him more satisfaction than striking a sweet tee shot down the middle, arcing a 7-iron to two feet or

draining a 25-foot putt. The left-hander plays off a Handicap Index of two after all. Post athletics career, the sport has put a new spring in his step, to the extent he openly states: “I’d be lost without golf.”

Becoming a Global Development Ambassador for The R&A in 2024 has therefore been a natural fit.

To attract new audiences to the sport and increase participation, The R&A continues to engage with stars from sport, stage and screen. Music icon Niall Horan, Hollywood actress Kathryn Newton, football star Gareth Bale, major champion Michelle Wie West and rugby great Bryan Habana are all R&A Global Development Ambassadors, using their worldwide appeal – notably on social media – to broaden the sport’s reach. Edwards has joined that notable group.

“When I retired from athletics there were two things I wanted to do,” explains Edwards. “One



was to go on a skiing holiday and the other was to play golf.

“Golf has now become a really important part of my life. I just fell in love with it and now golf is my main thing. The way I approach it has changed. When I first started, it was very much a performance thing, working hard on my short game for example, which is from my athletics background.

“Now what is important to me is the social element and the mental health and fitness benefits of the game, as opposed to just trying to get the lowest possible score.”

The dad-of-two is a member at The Northumberland Golf Club near his Newcastle home, yet his journeys north to East Lothian and Fife are much-loved. He recently achieved membership to The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.

Playing out in the fresh air, often with friends

and family, has meant that he is well-versed in promoting the mental and physical health benefits of golf – an area The R&A has worked hard in across recent years with various published research.

“I love the way that a golf course is put together, it’s so aesthetically pleasing, as well as all the benefits you gain from playing,” he continues. “Until I saw The R&A research into golf and health, I actually wasn’t aware of how good golf is for me. Everything The R&A has been doing around golf and health is music to my ears. It’s interesting because golf has become much more athletic rather than purely skill based.

“I love playing golf, I love playing with my mates in a four-ball and I love being outside, but I didn’t fully appreciate that this was actually really good for my health and fitness. I’d be lost without golf.”

At The 152nd Open at Royal Troon in July, Edwards was integral to The R&A's health messaging. The Englishman fronted the 'Walk To Win' step challenge over the Ayrshire links, which saw spectators logging their steps on the free Open app for a chance to win a four-ball with Edwards at Troon - among other top prizes - depending on how many steps were walked.

"There aren't many sports where you go and watch and do something that's actually good for your health - but you can in golf," notes Edwards. "Like many people I've got a fitness watch that tells me my steps, my distances, my calories and heart rate. It's really quite surprising how much of a workout golf is. It was great to be involved in 'Walk to Win'."

It was a busy week on site at Royal Troon, with Edwards inspiring young children at The R&A Swingzone and also speaking at a session one evening in the Camping Village. He also attended The Open Performance Summit, a round-table event organised by Dr Andrew Murray, who acts as a health advisor to The R&A and works with the University of Edinburgh and various professional golf tour organisations. Edwards was able to look at the impressive health and performance facilities for players at The Open and provide his own insights from his athletics career.

"The thing about golf is that it's easy fitness for me," he adds. "It's not going to prepare me to climb Mount Everest or run a marathon, but in terms of fitness for life I think there's nothing better."

Edwards - who credits Seve Ballesteros winning at St Andrews in 1984 as one of his favourite Open memories - was already scheduled to attend The Open, having relished the chance since 2022 to be involved behind the scenes in a scoring role.

"That was my third Open now," he explains. "I did the flags on the crossovers at the 7th and 11th on the Old Course at St Andrews for The

Edwards breaking the triple jump world record at the 1995 Gothenburg World Championships



“In terms of fitness for life I think there's nothing better”



150th Open in 2022, and then I've done Score Control for the last two years, which involves keeping an eye on the walking scorers, solving technical issues and controlling the displays on the big manual scoreboards on the iconic 18th grandstands.

"I feel part of the team now. We're like a family

and have already planned Royal Portrush next year. There's something special at The Open about having local clubs involved in pulling together the walking scorers. So to be at Royal Troon and have a role to play, as well as my new role with The R&A, was fantastic. I'd much rather be doing that than just watching." ●

England Golf's iGolf.

Bridging the gap between independent
golfers and club membership





**ENGLAND
GOLF**

England Golf's iGolf programme has created a pathway for independent golfers to become full club members, with over 12,000 subscribers having made that transition.

The initiative, which launched in 2021 with the aim of encouraging an estimated 2.3 million independent golfers to play more, monitor their performance and foster competitiveness, is proving to be a huge success.

In the three years since the programme started, the number of iGolf subscribers who have taken up club membership has hit five figures, generating an estimated £11 million in membership fees.

"We're thrilled to witness the remarkable success of the iGolf initiative and the impact it has had on the golfing community," said Claire Hodgson, Head of iGolf/iPlay.

"The transition of over 12,000 iGolf subscribers to club membership underpins the effectiveness of our efforts in promoting inclusivity, fostering engagement and our desire to support golf clubs across the country.

"We know that the programme caters for a whole host of people who love their golf but simply aren't able to get on the course as much as they'd like, while it caters for others who can't yet justify golf club membership.

"It really has proved to be the perfect solution for a number of people, and hopefully it continues to benefit more in the coming months and years."

Results from the latest iGolf subscriber survey demonstrated the initiative's impact on the behaviour of golfers, with 49 per cent of respondents reporting an increase in the amount they play.

Furthermore, 46 per cent expressed their likelihood to join a club in the future, suggesting a strengthening of the pathway to full club membership.

An overwhelming majority of subscribers (81 per cent) expressed satisfaction or extreme satisfaction with the initiative.

"Members join golf clubs for many different reasons," England Golf CEO Jeremy Tomlinson told the NCG Podcast. "iGolfers join for their own reasons, but what we've been able to create is a succession pathway."

Tomlinson cited the huge uptake

“ It really has proved to be the perfect solution for a number of people ”

in subscriptions (82,000), with 52,000 current subscribers, adding, "Part of the reason there is a drop-off is because 12,000 iGolfers have become members of golf clubs.

"They have taken it up, they've paid to get themselves a handicap, some insurance and either their circumstances changed where they could become a member, or they said, 'I like this. I like measuring my ability. I want to become more competitive. I want to be more sociable. I want to become a member of a golf club. I want to have those playing rights on a more regular basis.'" ●

What is iGolf?

iGolf allows non-club members to gain an official Handicap Index along with personal liability insurance.

Subscribers pay £46 a year, gain access to the MyEG app, MyStats and many other benefits.

They can also gain entry to exclusive iGolf events, the hole-in-one club and customer support.

iGolf handicaps are overseen by a dedicated England Golf handicap committee. ●



iGolfer testimonials

“iGolf definitely motivated me initially to play more golf because, once I had committed to it, I was really interested to see what my handicap index would be”

– Women & Golf Editor Emma Ballard



“It was perfect timing. I had just set myself a goal to get my handicap this summer. I had been looking at club memberships and the iGolf subscription, and then I won the giveaway for a year’s subscription!”

– Ashlea Milner, Hub Hero for the UK Women’s Golf Community



“It’s given me a target to achieve a lower handicap but also has become a fun tool to compete with friends, track each other’s progress and have side matches between us using the app”

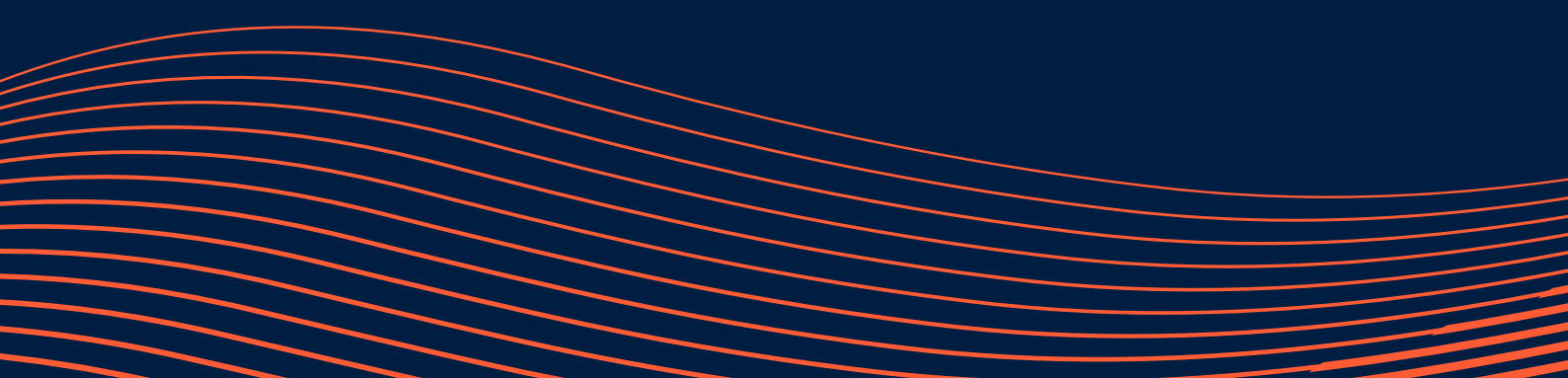
– England footballer Jack Butland





Paraguay Golf Assoc

Golf is growing in Paraguay thanks to a concerted effort from the nation to broaden the game's appeal and accessibility for the younger generation.





Paraguay Golf Association

President Alexander Kent is filled with optimism when he looks at the future of the sport in his country.

Through its Junior and Public School programmes, the national governing body has provided a catalyst for growth and the numbers provide ample proof that it is working.

Here, Kent explains what his association has been doing and the results being seen on the ground.

How many golf courses and players are there in Paraguay and how would you describe the strength of the game there?

We currently have five member courses in Paraguay in our association. There are two more that are undergoing administrative restructuring and another scheduled to open by the end of 2024. In addition, we have a 15-hole par-3 lighted public course that is part of our association's facilities.

We currently have 1,100 registered players with handicaps and another 400 to 500 casual players.

We believe our strength is the number of juniors joining the game as well as a growing interest of women in playing the sport.

How is golf perceived in Paraguay?

Golf was introduced by British and American immigrants and railroad workers in the late 1920s and for decades it was perceived by the population as a niche sport for a limited number of people who practised the game in the only golf course in the country.

However, in the late 1970s, the construction of two more golf courses and the inclusion of local players allowed for the creation of the Paraguay Golf Association and the first national teams.

Within a few years, the remarkable international success of players coming from all socioeconomic backgrounds increased the interest in the game, and the number of players multiplied from a few dozen to hundreds.

Is it growing?

Yes and at a quite impressive pace. In 2021, we had just over 650 registered players with handicaps and an estimated 1,000 players in total. By the end of this year, we expect to almost double those numbers.

The most interesting indicator is that growth is especially strong amongst women and children, followed by young adults between 25 and 30 years old.

Case Study

Association.

national governing body
Association

“We put special emphasis on values such as sportsmanship, hard work and self-control”

What message are you spreading about the game of golf in Paraguay?

Our association is promoting golf as a pathway to personal excellence through a challenging sport. In that respect, we put special emphasis on values such as sportsmanship, hard work and self-control as a means to develop everyone's maximum potential.

We also promote the practice of the sport as a healthy recreational activity and as an effective way to foster new social networks. Our association organises over 50 events every year, ranging from professional golf tournaments to local tours for golfers of all levels, ages and genders.

Some of the new efforts starting in 2024 are the Initiation Tour (aimed at children from five to 12 years old), the Ladies Tour and the National Par 3 Night Golf Tour. We are delighted with great reviews from new players and unparalleled success with record numbers.

What can you tell us about the Junior Golf Programme?

The process starts in the academies of our association's member clubs and our public course facilities. The Initiation Tour is the first stage of national level competition, starting at ages five to seven. This tour's objective is mainly recreational, helping kids grow interest and love for the game.

Once they decide they will pursue a career in golf, young players from eight to 12 years old move on to the APG National Tour, which hosts ten events each year. At this stage, we promote healthy competition and the development of values that characterise our sport such as





Golf in Paraguay – the numbers

1,100

registered players
with handicaps

150

youngsters involved
in the Junior Golf
Programme

30%

increase in
participants in
the Junior Golf
Programme in the
past three years

50

events organised
annually by the
Paraguay Golf
Association

sportsmanship and work ethics.

In our High-Performance Programme, our goal is to mentor young players to become competent student athletes. Starting in 2024, we launched a programme that focuses on preparing youngsters in their path to collegiate golf. We emphasise the need to combine excellence in academics and sports. In that respect, we have partnered with our National Olympic Committee and organisations such as Athletes USA to counsel players in preparing a well-planned career guiding them in the multidisciplinary tasks a high-performance student athlete needs to address. In total, the Junior Golf Programme involves more than 150 juniors.

How successful has it been?

It has been quite successful in qualitative and quantitative terms. We have increased the number of participants in our programme by over 30 per cent in the past three years, and we have obtained international individual and team titles in the main junior categories in the under-15 and under-18 South American Championship in the past two years.

The number of student athletes obtaining scholarships in prestigious universities has also increased exponentially, with an even greater number of young players preparing for collegiate golf.

What do you hope to achieve with this programme?

We are aware that only an exceedingly small percentage of players can make a living as professional players. In that respect, our efforts are centred at counselling parents on the importance of developing the full athletic potential of young players without neglecting a proper academic grounding.

Our goal is to reach 30 to 40 players regularly competing at collegiate level. Our hope is to guide our juniors to the gates of collegiate golf where they can discover their athletic potential while obtaining a world-class education in the process.

What is the Public School Golf Initiative?

The initiative is an effort to expand the reach and knowledge of golf in non-traditional settings. We have been supporting activities in public schools and communities that otherwise have no interaction with the game. Our aim is to increase awareness and hopefully transform into engagement with golf.





“ We emphasise
the need to combine
excellence in
academics and
sports ”



We have also financed free clinics in public and private spaces provided by local municipalities and local businesses in cities that have no golf courses yet but have the socio-economic potential to host a golf course soon.

This initiative enables kids to have contact with our game, learn about the basic general rules, and it provides a foundational understanding that could trigger interest in a percentage of participants.

How has The R&A helped with the Junior Golf and Public School Golf programmes?

The R&A's support has been crucial for our association, providing a much-needed financial support to our junior programmes in general and the public school initiative in particular.

The R&A has been a great benefactor throughout the years to our association. On top of the financial assistance, The R&A's contribution to the development of junior programmes ranges from machinery equipment used in our public course maintenance, to golf equipment used in many academies that allows the attraction of new golfers. ●

R&A



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