



International News

EDUCATING GOLF TEACHING PROFESSIONALS WORLDWIDE!



JAPAN NEWS

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NURTURING THE GAME

By Bennett Galloway

The development of grassroots golf programs is essential for overall growth in any country. Golf in Asia has seen huge expansion and increasing popularity in recent years. However, it is important to note that participation has historically occurred in the social upper class (aged 50 years and above) or players introduced to the game by way of business or lifestyle associations (aged 35 years and above). The task faced here now is how to encourage new players to the game.

Japan is blessed with the most golf courses in the world after the United States, with some 2,400 18-holes or more tracks. Perfect, you might think, but gaining access to these clubs for juniors is a daunting task. Most clubs are set up to cater to their memberships that are often comprised of corporate clients or

people looking to use their memberships for entertaining clients and friends. It just hasn't been a very kid-friendly environment. This situation just can't continue if Japan wants to create the next generation of golfers.

The post 3/11 earthquake and nuclear issue, along with the earlier Lehman shock, has most clubs on the ropes, so to speak, with many now looking for potential new areas of growth. This economic reality has created a bit of a race to the bottom on green fees that is actually helping improve access for juniors. Most clubs now also offer junior rates, and are beginning to target families with father/son packages on certain days. However, with juniors still representing less than one percent of the golfing population here when compared to the USA, Australia, Canada, and parts of Europe where the numbers range from 6 to 8.5 percent, Japan still has a long way to go.

On a positive front, professional golfers here are, and have always been, treated like gods! So, when young superstar golfers like Ryo Ishikawa and Ai Miyazato do beat the odds and make it, there is no shortage of media attention, and this does trickle down

to the youth. A modern Japanese child has huge amounts of things already taxing their time such as cram schools (a school kids go to after school to continue studying), and more traditional afterschool school clubs like judo, baseball, swimming, kendo, etc. After-school golf programs and junior golf groups with access or passes at local nearby clubs don't exist! This is an area where desperate improvement is needed. Creating a junior golfing culture in an already





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J A P A N N E W S (c o n t i n u e d)

culture-rich country is the task at hand faced by the industry.

There are some getting involved. U.S. Kids Golf Japan, who are a relative newcomer here, are taking up the challenge with a recently released bilingual version of their American three-booklet teaching program. This program, once it catches on, will also allow students to access their over 30 yearly junior tournaments here in Japan, as well as qualify for international events. Instructors who are able to create junior programs are, in essence, painting on a new canvas, but with tried-and-true programs like this, this task will be a bit easier! USGTF-Japan members are well-positioned to do just that, and with new teaching methods and a firm grasp of the current technologies available, we are leading the break from the old guard here in Japan. There is a long way still to go, but for those of us setting the ground work for more participation in the game, the opportunity to do what we love and make a difference in so many lives continues to be the calling of a lifetime!

For more information on golf in Japan please see www.golf-in-japan.com. For junior information, check out the U.S. Kids Golf Japan website at www.uskgj.com.



About

the author: Bennett Galloway

is a longtime resident of Japan and the director of golf for Gotemba Golf Club and Belle View Nagao G.C. in Shizuoka, near Mt. Fuji. He is also a member of the Golf Writers Association of America and a USGTF Level III teaching professional, providing lessons for all ages and abilities, in English or Japanese. He also specializes in in-bound golf tours to Japan with Golf Shizuoka and Golf Hakone, and has recently accepted a role as tournament director for U.S. Kids Golf Japan.



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