

Some of our Lady and Junior Girl golfers - in their own words

**Kelly McNulty**

Being from a non-golfing family I started getting interested in golf from the age of 11 having watched it on television and been to professional golf competitions with my family, I then had some junior lessons with various professionals and visited various "Get in to golf" coaches and programmes and was generally just getting involved in golf as it was fun. I played in fun golf competitions with two boys Connor Turnbull and Liam Turnbull on Friday nights at the golf club when we juniors had the course to ourselves and it was great fun. I was determined to be good at golf and took it more and more seriously every year having been selected for the England Birdie squads from the age of 12 and was playing in many local junior golf competitions which was exciting and really good fun. Then I progressed through the squads meeting many other girls and boys playing in competitions or playing for other golf club teams however whilst playing in the junior county competitions.

I was 15 and playing in all the top age group competitions around the country and have made many friends around the country until I was 16 and in the England Select Squad being the only player in Northumberland selected for this. I am now 18 and are currently involved in the ASSE England Golf programme in my second year having been one of four people in the North of England/Cumbria/Durham selected for this programme and would like to carry on playing golf and enjoying it for as long as possible and see where the fun takes me.

From the age of 11 I have won many local junior opens at Ponteland, Carlisle, Penrith, Whitley Bay, Dinsdale spa, Ramside, Longhirst, Tynemouth, Arcot, Blyth. My handicap started at 36 and gradually went down over the years as I was winning many of the junior girls county competitions including the junior girls under 21 girls county championship and being the girls county matchplay champion for the last two years. So over the years my handicap got gradually less than 18. Once my handicap was less than 9 I was winning the spring, summer and autumn competitions run by the men's county golf association , winning many ladies competitions including being Whitley Bay's both junior girls and club champion, and playing in the national competitions where I won third best gross in the Scottish under 14's best nett, semi finalist in the Northern Womens, top ten finish in Northern girls. My handicap is now down to 3.

**Kim McKenna**

I have now been a member 35 years. I first played golf with my Uncle when I was 9. I spent all my school holidays at the club from then on and played with all the junior boys as there were no other junior girls at that time. I loved every minute of it, both the golf and the social side.

England Under 21, Girl and Schoolgirl International, County Champion, 2 x North of England Under 21 Champion, Under 21 Northumberland Champion ( boys and girls ), Ladies British Amateur, Championship quarter finalist, English Under 25 Championship Semi finalist, 21 x Club Championship winner.

+1 handicap obtained

**Rebecca Ferguson**

I am 21 and a Final year Sport & Exercise Development student at Sunderland University

I have been golf for five seasons and first got into golf when I had to take a break from athletics due to sore shins. My biggest athletics achievement was finishing 3rd in 800m in the UK Athletics Indoor Championships back in 2008. Innately sporty, I needed something to satisfy my competitive desire,

and that something turned out to be golf. I come from a golfing family, my dad having played off 3, my auntie 21 times Club Champion and former England International, my uncle (John Mckenna) the PGA Pro at Tynemouth and then my great uncle and granddad former Captain's. Five years since having first picked up a club, and with my shins fully recovered, I now divide my time equally between training with Gateshead Harriers and playing golf, needless to say I'm one busy girl!

The key to my success in 2013 is being selected as part of the Northumberland county team which has undoubtedly been pivotal. Having the opportunity to play at County Match Week against strong teams such as Yorkshire and Lancashire forced me to step up my game and bring out the best in me. Throughout the summer Tynemouth Golf Club was my second home and to see that the hours spent practicing and playing have paid off makes me very proud and even more determined to keep it up. My family have been so supportive and without them (and John's brilliant tuition!) I wouldn't be where I am now. In 2013 I won the Titleist HowdidIdo Order of Merit Ladies section, a nationwide competition played throughout the season. In 2013 my handicap reduced from 9 to 3.

**Golfing ambitions for 2014 and beyond:** Prior to the start of last season I'd never broken 80 and so to shoot level par (73) on so many occasions I was thrilled! Since I've never broken par that has to be my first goal. Once I've achieved that I'd like to think I could put my auntie's course record in danger! Winning the County Championships is top of my list and having only played in two, who knows? It could be third time lucky! Getting down to scratch would be fantastic. Once my handicap is low enough I'd like to play in as many national competitions as possible and then see where it goes from there.

#### **Jenny Bilton**

My whole family play golf, so it was no surprise that I started playing from a young age.

I think it was at the age of 7 when my Dad decided it was a good idea to let me loose on the golf course with only a 7 iron, I am sure you can imagine I didn't post the best score by the end but I had enjoyed myself. I played for fun with my family and then I started to have lessons on a Saturday morning from John McKenna, with a group of other juniors (who were mainly boys!). It was because of the lack of girls in the club that I wasn't very passionate about the sport, the boys were not very welcoming on the Friday junior competition evenings and so I did not want to play, other than very occasionally with my parents on a Sunday.

It was only when Doreen Swinburne, who was then the Girls' County Junior Organiser, invited me to join the Junior Girls County team, at the age of 12, that I really became interested and excited about golf. Doreen was a truly inspirational lady, who always encouraged and supported 'her' girls and I owe her such a lot for making me the golfer I am. I am sure everyone who was lucky enough to be in her team would agree with me in saying that she did a huge amount for Junior Girls golf in Northumberland County and that there would be a lot more girls playing if there were more people like her in the region's clubs.

I played regularly for the under 18 County team and progressed through to the Ladies team, but unfortunately, as I have become older and work commitments have become a priority, I am unable to play as often as I would like to. I am still involved with the Ladies County team and continue to enjoy these opportunities but am, sadly, restricted by time.

One of my goals this year, 2014, is to play more golf and reignite the passion that Doreen sparked those years ago. I would advise any girl, who is considering golf, to be involved. It is a fantastic sport with many more opportunities now, compared to when I was young, and I promise that if you give it a try you will want more!