

When the Pro's have visited Rowlands Castle Golf Club

The first professional match recorded at the club was in July 1923, when 1920 Open Champion, George Duncan, played an exhibition match against our then club professional - A Hamilton. The next recorded Professional match was in 1944 when, to raise money for the 'Daily Sketch War Relief Fund', a Mr A Padgham and a Mr G Kirby played Sam King and our Professional, Bill Sawford.

After the war there were various visits from well-known professionals, including an exhibition match in 1963 between Neil Coles, Max Faulkner, George Will and our own Club Pro, Pat Roberts. There have also been numerous unofficial visits over the years including Harry Wheatman, Bernard Hunt and Michael Bonallack and there are even rumours that Bobby Locke also graced our fairways, though we have no official record of it.

The first big Pro-Am event was held in 1973 when, to celebrate the opening of the new course, a national PGA event was staged, attracting most of the top 50 players in the country. Tony Jacklin who arrived by helicopter from his home in the Cotswolds. Jacklin had won The Open in 1969 and the US Open in 1970, was by far the biggest name to play. Regrettably Tony found our course to be tough that day, and after toiling to a round of 76, he beat a rather hasty retreat in his helicopter.

Peter Ousterhouse was another 'star' name to play that day, along with Malcom Gregson. Malcom had an outstanding round of 66 and won the event and in the process set a new course record.

A follow up event was held in 1974, some 8 months after the first, and was very much a repeat of the previous one again, attracting a very strong field competing for an increased prize fund of £5,000. The professional prize was won by Peter Townsend who shot a course record equalling 66, which included an eagle and five birdies.

Subsequently the PGA wanted £10 000 for any future events, which led to the demise of national PGA events at the club.

However, in 1978 the club held a smaller scale event, sponsored by the Nationwide Building Society, which attracted many of the best-known club professionals from across the south. There were 40 teams of three players (1 Pro and 2 Am's per team), with the top prize being shared by Terry Pinner, John Hay and Clive Bonner, who all scored level par 72's.

The next time the professionals visited was in 1979 when the club hosted the Coral Classic in association with the variety club of Great Britain. This event raised £25 000 for the Sunshine Coaches charity. It was estimated that around 6,000 spectators turned up on the day to watch such stars as Bruce Forsyth, Jimmy Tarbuck, Tommy Cooper and Jimmy Hill from the world of showbiz. Golfing stars Sam Torrance, Mark James, Ken Brown, Tommy Horton and Bernard Gallagher also appeared. Putting on the event was a great logistical challenge, with extra car-parking being provided on the village recreation ground, and a tented village erected on the practice ground.

The weather in 1979 was very much like this autumn with unseasonable sunshine for the players, however the event had to be delayed for 45 minutes for the early morning fog to burn off. A young Gordon Brand took full advantage of the weather to shoot a near faultless round of 68, to collect the £1,000 first prize. The course caused quite a few headaches for some of Europe's top players, however Brands only blemish was on the 14th where he was forced to three putt for his only dropped shot in an otherwise immaculate round. If the 14th was not to Brands liking, the 11th, 12th and 17th certainly were, with all of them birdie holes and on at least 3 other holes he slid birdie putts fractionally

out of line. It was not only Brands putter that was hot, his approach play was described in the 'Racing Post' as "majestic", not missing a green all round.

Whilst Brand, an early starter sat outside the clubhouse, a tense battle developed between Craig Defoy, Vincente Fernandes, Mike King and Ewen Murray, who eventually shared joint second place, one stroke behind Brand.

The Pro-Am event itself was played very much in a high jinks spirit, with the celebrities keeping the galleries entertained with their tales and anecdotes. One of the biggest names to play was Bruce Forsyth, who literally raced in and raced out again on his way to a holiday in Spain, taking with him the Pro-Am team prize, in a team consisting of himself, Bernard Gallacher, Dick Kravitz and Eddie Costello, with a net 60.

The Rowlands Castle course was not to everyone's liking. Carl Mason hit his drive out of bounds on the first tee and, then repeating the shot on the second tee, before ripping his card up and marching of the course in disgust!

There was also an element of representation from Rowlands Castle GC, with Club Professional Terry Healy taking the 1st shot of event. Terry went on to shoot a disappointing round of 77 on his home course. The former Rowlands Castle Professional was reunited with golfing star Mike King, who Terry had taught the game to, many years earlier, whilst working in Reading.

The Pro-Am scene at Rowlands Castle has not been solely the preserve of the men and there have been several very successful Ladies Professional events. The first recorded appearance of lady professionals was in the late 1960's when Vivian Saunders partnered a lady Irish professional in a match against our own Pat Roberts and Keith Macdonald from Goodwood.

In both 1987 and 1990, our ladies section organised two, ladies only Pro-Ams, which were well supported with over 150 participants in both events. These were huge successes and featured many local professionals from the Hampshire area, with lots of money being raised for the Rowlands Ladies Captains charity.

In our centenary year 2002, a two-day event was held, supported by the southern area PGA, in which the ladies played on the Thursday and the men on the Friday, with the Professionals competing over 36 holes. The winner, recording an impressive 137, was Mark Nichols playing from Surry Health and Fitness. In 2006 we held our last Pro-Am event, which again was a collaboration with the Southern Region PGA and saw a field of 150 players.

In 2018, Our professional, Peter Klepacz, hosted a Hampshire PGA event which proved a tremendous success attracting nearly 50 teams, and was one of the biggest events in the south of England. In a year when the weather had been so glorious, ironically the Gods were against us that day. Despite the conditions the event was won by Jimmy Green and Elliot Groves, who both shot very credible 68s. As you may be aware, we have plans to run another Pro-Am event in 2019 – watch out for the details a little later in the year.

Jimmy Klepacz