

Asia Pacific Amateur Championship - Achieving its Aims

By Bruce Young

The fifth staging of the Asia Pacific Amateur Championship (AAC) will be played at the Nanshan International Golf Club in Shandong Province in China this October with the 120 player field not only chasing the chance to play the Masters in April of 2014 but looking to meet the high expectations created by those who have played well in the event in each of the last four years.

In its four short years to date, the success of the event has exceeded the expectations of all, the quality of player being produced in the Asia Pacific Region showing just how capable they are of matching it and beating the best in the world.

The Asia Pacific Golf Federation, the Masters and the R&A jointly support the event with much of the funding coming from Augusta National and the R&A who use proceeds from the significant success of their respective flagship championships, the Masters and the Open Championship, to support golf internationally.

The region's leading amateurs have repaid the favour by performing with great credit in some of the world's leading events, further highlighting the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the givers and receivers.

The winner of the event earns a start at the Masters at Augusta National the following year and on three of the four occasions in which it has been held the recipient of that much sought after honour has made the cut and on two occasions has led the amateurs.

Their performances have confirmed the growing status of the event and the growing quality of amateur golf in Asia and highlighted that the gesture by two of the world's leading golfing organisations in supporting the event is reaping rewards.

In 2009 the inaugural event was held in China and won by Korean Chang Won Han at Mission Hills. Han perhaps

understandably missed the cut at the Masters but over the next three years the performances of winners of the Asia Pacific Amateur Championship have been simply stunning.

In 2010 the event was won for the first of two occasions by Japan's Hideki Matsuyama who defeated Australia's Tarquin MacManus by five shots at the Kasumigaseki Country Club in Japan. The victory secured Matsuyama a start at Augusta National five months later, one he took full advantage of by making the cut and finishing as the leading amateur.

Matsuyama would win again when the event was played in Singapore in 2011 defeating Korea's Soo Min Lee by one shot. Again, Matsuyama would make the cut at the Masters in 2012 and although he did not finish as the leading amateur that year he further confirmed his immense promise.

Matsuyama finished 4th in Thailand in 2012 in what would be his final appearance at the Asian Amateur but within months he was establishing himself as the most dominant player on the Japan Golf Tour in 2013 and by August he had jumped to the 28th position in the world ranking producing two great finishes at the US Open and Open Championships in the process.

In 2012, came and even greater performance. 14 year old Guan Tianlang held off one of amateur golf's best players over the past two years in Pan Tseng Cheng of Chinese Taipei to win the event in Thailand, setting the scene for him to become the youngest player to ever play at the Masters.

Not only did Guan make the field for the 2013 Masters, he would be the only amateur to make the cut, continuing the great trend of the AAC and doing so despite a one shot slow play penalty being imposed on him during round two.

The golfer who finished third behind Guan in Thailand last October, Australia's Oliver Goss, would go on to finish





Guan Tianlang
Photos - Asia Amateur Championship

runner-up at the US Amateur in 2013 for which he receives a start at Augusta National but even so he will be in China this year to play the event once again, taking a break from his time at the University of Tennessee to do so.

The 72 hole stroke-play event is made up of the leading two players from the 37 Asia Pacific Golf Confederation (APGC) affiliated organisations. Each organisation is automatically provided with two positions, which are to be filled by their highest-ranked players from the World Amateur Golf Rankings (WAGR) as of 1 August 2013. If there is only one or no players from a member organisation in the rankings, a member organisation is able to nominate one or two players accordingly provided the player/s have a handicap of 5.4 or less. The remainder of the field is filled by taking the next highest ranked players from the WAGR with the maximum number of players allowed from any organisation being six. The only exception is for the host country, which is allowed to nominate an additional four players.

The R&A and Augusta National are delighted with the outstanding results the event is producing.

"The game in the region is still relatively new," said Augusta National Chairman Billy Payne. "So many youngsters are aspiring to greatness and to be able to give them this opportunity in partnership with the R&A to develop the game and create heroes is something we at Augusta felt we should be doing.

"We have been involved in this region for some year using the commercial success of the Open Championship to help fund coaching programmes" said R&A Secretary Peter Dawson. "It is wonderful to have the organisers of two major championships come together like this to support the growth of the game and the efforts of the Asia Pacific Golf Confederation which represents the 36 national associations throughout the Asia Pacific Region.

Payne, Dawson and the Colin Phillips, the Honorary Secretary of the Asia Pacific Golf Confederation and former Executive Director of Golf Australia and their respective teams, can all be very proud of an event that has rapidly become one of the leading amateur events in world golf.

The event now has two hours of live television coverage per day and broadcast worldwide.

