



Centenary Celebrations for Fourth Oldest PGA

By Bruce Young

The New Zealand Professional Golfers Association celebrates its centenary in 2013, the organisation formed in October of 1913 when twelve professionals gathered in Dunedin in the country's South Island to discuss various issues surrounding the conditions of their profession and a better relationship with the then New Zealand Golf Association who administered the game of golf in New Zealand then and now.

One year later the organisation went into recess due to onset of World War 1 but re-established itself in 1922 at a meeting in Palmerston North in the southern region of the North Island, again discussion on conditions, pricing, playing rights for the New Zealand Open and job opportunities were the order of the day.

It was from here that the NZPGA began to build on its membership although many clubs in those early days were serviced by a travelling regional professional rather than a professional of their own.



Joe Kirkwood NZPGA Champion 1920

The first President of the PGA of New Zealand was Fred Hood, the then club professional at the Auckland Golf Club, although most of those present at that initial meeting were given a role on the board with nine Vice Presidents and a Treasurer appointed.

The organisation is the fourth oldest Professional Golfers Association in the world after Great Britain and Ireland, Canada and Australia and surprisingly ahead of the USA. It has grown from those tentative beginning to one that contains more than 400 members, comprising around 220 Full or Vocational members, 60 Tour professionals and 35 Trainees, with the balance made up of Senior / Retired and Honorary members.

The first PGA Championship was played in 1920 and won by the Australian Joe Kirkwood who three years later would become the first Australian to win on what would eventually be known as the PGA Tour when successful at the Houston Invitational. Kirkwood trail-blazed Australian professional golf in the USA but also won the New Zealand Open in 1920. The New Zealand professional championship, run by the New Zealand Golf Association, was the forerunner to the inaugural New Zealand PGA Championship in 1920.

The PGA Championship was played in nearly every year other than war years until 1987 when Frank Nobilo won the second of his two titles. The event struggled with sponsorship, scheduling and venue issues until in 2004 it was resurrected as a then Nationwide Tour event at Clearwater in Christchurch where it would remain until 2010. No event was held in 2011 but in 2012 it returned as a new look New Zealand PGA Championship at the Hills Golf Club in Arrowtown in Central Otago

and played under a pro am format over the final two rounds, a concept that gave the event renewed life.

Some of the most respected players in Australasian and world golf have won the title. Peter Thomson, Bruce Crampton, Kel Nagle, Tony Jacklin, Jumbo Ozaki and Graham Marsh are amongst the more recognised names but locals have also played their part. Andy Shaw was a six time winner, Alex Murray won on four occasions, Sir Bob Charles and John Lister won three times each and Frank Nobilo twice.

The New Zealand Golf Tour was at its peak during the late 1960's to the early 1980's, perhaps reflecting a period where other tours worldwide were not quite as extended or lucrative. This offered the opportunity to access some of Australasia's best, many of the regular competitors back then also regulars on other tours internationally and able to fit the end of year events into their schedule in an era when the European and USPGA Tours finished a lot earlier than is the case now.

As a country with one of the highest ratios of golf courses per capita in the world, and golf a sport that has the highest participation rate of any in New Zealand, the club professional has played a significant role in the development of the game. Several including the likes of Fred Hood doubled as golf course designers as golfing layouts multiplied in the early 1900's. Many of the early professionals had learned their trade in their home countries of Great Britain but several of those who ply their trade today are now considered amongst the best teaching professionals in the game.



New Zealand golf has played host to some of the game's greatest players including the likes of Gene Sarazen, Walter Hagen, Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman, Tom Watson, Lee Trevino, Gary Player, Seve Ballesteros, Bobby Locke and Phil Mickelson to name but a mere few. In an era before wall to wall coverage of tournament golf via pay television, New Zealanders got to see the great play in their homeland and I personally remember the significant impact of seeing Palmer play Charles in an exhibition match in Dunedin in 1966.

New Zealand has produced two major champions in Bob Charles and Michael Campbell and in 1992 recorded a feat which almost equalled those performances when the team of Michael Campbell, Phil Taturangi, Stephen Scahill and Grant Moorehead won the Eisenhower trophy with both Campbell and Taturangi going on to record victories on the PGA Tour and elsewhere. Other New Zealanders to win on the PGA Tour include Charles, Campbell, John Lister, Craig Perks and Frank Nobilo while Greg Turner won four European Tour events in addition to an Australian PGA Championship.

In more recent years New Zealand has produced two amazingly precocious golfing prodigies in Danny Lee and Lydia Ko. Both were born in South Korea but both became outstanding world talents because, to a large extent, of the coaching programmes and facilities available to them in New Zealand.

There is little doubt that New Zealand golf has boxed above its weight internationally and much of that success can be traced back to the growth and benefits of the New Zealand Professional Golfers Association and its members.

Feature activities in this the centenary year are the New Zealand PGA Championship, played earlier in the year and won by Michael Hendry, a re-enactment of the original board meeting at Balmacewan in Dunedin in October and the New Zealand PGA Foursomes Championship in Auckland the day before a Gala Dinner on November 8th.

Disappointingly the Dinner clashes with the Friday evening of the Australian PGA Championship on the Gold Coast although the Australian PGA can perhaps accept responsibility for the clash as the announcement of the date of their annual championship at Royal Pines on the Gold Coast was left until well after the New Zealanders had confirmed their Gala Dinner. There would be no doubt several who would enjoy being in two places at once that week.

Current President of the NZPGA, Geoff Smart, a Sydneysider, joined the NZPGA in 1972 and has seen a lot of changes in that time but it appears more are to come.

"Since 1972 our membership numbers have quadrupled and our administration has moved from a voluntary role to a professionally run organization, playing a major role in the golf industry," said Smart. "We now have an education programme which produces PGA professionals with qualifications recognised throughout the world.

Smart also outlined plans that are afoot for the possible merger of the NZPGA and NZ Golf, studies for which have been carried out this year.

"The NZPGA and NZ Golf are currently investigating the best practical model for the game of golf in New Zealand. We have been working together for the past couple of years and we are close to appointing an independent Chairperson to guide representatives from both organisations as we look at the best governance and administration models for our sport. This really is a very exciting time to be involved and I am looking forward to a bright future for our wonderful game here in this country."

Duncan Simpson the CEO of the NZPGA outlined earlier this year the reasons for considering a closer association between NZ Golf and the NZPGA.



Ozaki - NZPGA

"When the NZPGA was reviewing its strategic plan a couple of years ago we became increasingly aware that the issues we were addressing were issues with the game of golf generally and not just the PGA, and so we began talking with New Zealand Golf and discussed the idea of a joint plan and vision."

Those who attend the special evening in November will feel they have been part of a significant occasion in New Zealand and perhaps even Australasian golf. They will look back on 100 years of golfing achievement and look ahead to what the future may hold in a game which is very much part of the sporting psyche of a very sporting country.



Formal wear was the style when professionals gathered at the St Clair Golf Club in Dunedin in 1938.

Pictures - NZ PGA Centenary for pictures

