

## **Irene Country Club Golf Captain's Report 2009/2010**

Fellow golfers,

Every year we unfortunately have to say goodbye to some of our most valued members who are taken away from us before their time. During the past year we had to bid farewell to a man who was an Irene legend, Michael "Podge" Blair. He was a man who had an infectious cheerful personality and there was just no way of keeping him from the centre of the festivities. Amongst all of those who have left us this year, his will almost certainly be the most obvious absence.

Once again the Golf Committee has experienced a tumultuous year. We started the year one member short of the maximum allowed in terms of the constitution. However, the committee took a decision to continue as elected, without co-opting a member to fill the vacancy and to monitor the situation on an ongoing basis. Kenny Mdhuli was forced to resign shortly after this due to work commitments and John Farquhar, the Vice Captain relocated to Tanzania. Following John's resignation, Russell Page was co-opted onto the committee for the remainder of the year and Yzette Terreblanche, the Ladies Captain, acted as Vice Captain. I am extremely gratified to see that the list of candidates for tonight's elections means that there will be votes for all of the available positions on the 2010/2011 Golf Committee. I believe that the level of interest shown bodes well for the future of the golf section at Irene Country Club.

There was also attrition amongst the ranks of the club's employees associated with the running of golf at the club. The previous financial officer was replaced following the long delays experienced in moving over from the old NGN financial system to Astute. Her departure was followed by the resignations of both the General Manager, Chris Shough and the Golf Operations Manager, Owen Baker. Both of these resignations took place on an amicable basis and I'd personally like to wish them well on behalf of the Golf Committee and golfing members in their future endeavours. During the course of the past year the Board of the club have appointed the Mark Wiltshire Group as management consultants in order to take the club, and the golfing experience in particular, to the next level. MWG are in the process of finalizing the appointment of the top layer of the management structure, including Mr Emile Bernhardt as the new Sports Director. Emile is a PGA qualified professional golfer, who also has internationally recognised tennis and rugby coaching qualifications. He has a degree in Sports Management and Marketing, which makes him an ideal candidate for the post at Irene. I'm sure that the new Golf Committee will be able to make major strides towards improving the members' experience at Irene with his help.

The roles of the Golf Committee are varied and certain portfolios are traditionally allocated to various people. During the past year there was a certain degree of departure from the previously established traditions. This was mostly brought about by the small size of the committee and was

intended to keep the entire committee up to date and involved in all the relevant issues. The most important role of the committee, in my personal view, is to ensure that the golf course is in the best possible condition and that the experience enjoyed by members and guests during normal club days and major competitions is as good as it can be. The golf course is possibly in the best condition ever. The recent rains have meant that, at times, it was not always possible to cut the rough as short as we would like, but in general the tees, fairways and greens have been in immaculate condition. A special word of thanks goes out to Prof. At Schoeman, Joseph Leseha and the maintenance team for the hard work that they have put into ensuring the condition of the course.

Regarding the aspects surrounding the serving of members' needs there have been both successes and failures. To date, the biggest outstanding issue is the booking system, particularly on Saturday mornings. Following many delays we are now finally in a position to announce that there are measures being put in place to address the situation. Within the next month an on-line booking system will be installed at the club. This will mean that members are able to book times up to two weeks in advance from the comfort of their homes or offices. It will also mean that problems experienced with non-members booking during peak times, as well as double bookings, will be a thing of the past. Some of the success stories have been the successful hosting of the 2009 Mid-Amateur IPT in October last year. The tournament was eventually won by KZN and Gauteng North were undefeated on their way to regaining promotion to the A-section of the tournament. All of the participating teams complimented the club and the management on the quality of the golf course and the professional approach to all the arrangements.

Other improvements that directly impact the experience of the golf members at the club have been the changes to the facilities. The new sound system, in conjunction with a new ceiling above the members' bar has significantly improved the acoustics so that it is now much more pleasant to have a conversation, watch a sporting event, or listen to music in the pub. The changes to the men's changerooms are still a work in progress, but already there has been an improvement in the amount of space available for changing and there are further developments to come. One of the most pleasing improvements that is on course for the near future is the creation of an outdoor bar area under the trees overlooking the tennis courts. This is an attraction that is much loved by many members and visitors to Irene. However, since the closure of the servery bar there have been problems with service in this area. The new outdoor bar is an attempt to address this and to once again make this area a featured attraction.

One of the most important roles to be addressed by the Golf Committee is the running of the club's major tournaments. This year produced its own series of problems exacerbated by the resignation of Owen Baker, but in general the tournaments have gone off extremely well. It was my fervent wish that we could announce the winners of the Law and Waverly Cups at this function tonight. However, due to the extremely late completion of the competitions

last year, this was not possible. The Waverly Cup has been concluded and congratulations go out to Paul Terrey and Chris Porter for defeating Anton van Wyk and Owen Baker in the final. The Law Cup has reached the final stages and should be concluded in the next two weeks. Following the conclusion of these tournaments, new entries will be called for and the tournaments will then be able to start around the traditional date of July to ensure completion by next year's AGM. This will also allow reasonable time to complete the various rounds, unlike this year where we had to impose harsh deadlines in an effort to get all games completed on time. Although we were ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavour, I'd like to thank all the players for attempting to complete their fixtures on time, notwithstanding the disruptive effects of the weather over the last few months. In view of the fact that the Law Cup has not been concluded, the handover ceremony for the trophies will be deferred for a few weeks and the winners will then be invited to attend a social function at the club, along with all the rest of the members, as was done last year.

The winners of the past year's knockout competitions are as follows:

**Law Cup:** Not concluded yet

**Waverly Cup:** Winners: Paul Terrey & Chris Porter  
Runners up: Anton van Wyk & Owen Baker

**Mixed Knockout:** Winners: Karen Ireland & Paul Davel  
Runners up: Louise Oosthuizen & Jimmy Dobson

This year's club championships, expertly organised by Anton van Wyk, managed to address many of the issues that have plagued previous stagings of the event. There are still a few issues to be resolved in the future. One of the most important of these is to incorporate the C-Division on the same weekend as the rest of the field whilst at the same time maintaining the improved pace of play exhibited this year. This year was notable in that Matthew Bright, from the Players Academy, was both the junior and overall club champion in the same year. Matthew, along with some of the other Players Academy students will hopefully go on to represent Irene with distinction in the league this year and return us to the top flight of Gauteng North competition. The league season kicks off properly in May, but those teams that have been in action so far have done reasonably well. Representing the club at league is an opportunity that is open to all members, particularly in the ladies, mixed, seniors and handicap leagues and I would urge all members to seriously consider making themselves available when the requests for participation are displayed in the sports shop and advertised in the Red Note.

One of the most obvious issues that came out of last year's Captain's report was the parlous state of the club's financial position. Many initiatives have been introduced by the Board and the management team in an attempt to improve the efficiency of the operations at the club. There is now tighter control of stock at the club and the renewed focus on costs has led to a significant improvement in the club's financial position. The final audited

statements are not yet available from the auditors, so the information presented here must be viewed as being provisional. As at 27 January this year total golf membership stood at 775 members. This can be contrasted with the position in July 2009, when we had 854 members on the books. Part of this reduction can be ascribed to the hard work put in by the office to clean up the membership lists to remove people who had been inactive for a long time. It does, however, highlight the fact that there is clearly room to increase membership numbers, particularly in limited membership categories, which do not impact on weekend fields.

The figures for last year indicate that there were 16,203 rounds played by members during the year compared to 24,313 rounds completed by visitors. These visitor numbers obviously include golf days, group bookings, league matches, etc., but it does highlight how important the visitor rounds are to the financial sustainability of the club. The unaudited results show that the golf operation at Irene Country Club had an income of approximately R5.96 million and expenses of R2.04 million in the 2009 financial year thus realising a profit of R3.92 million. This "profit" excludes the golf section's contribution to general administration and expenses such as municipal services, rates, telephones, bank charges, etc. These figures will be distributed in three weeks time when the club's financial statements are presented at the club's AGM.

The budget for the 2010 financial year has been prepared and accepted by the Board. The overall contribution by golf to the club's financial health is similar to that experienced in 2009. Obviously 2010 is a special year in the history of the country and we as a club would be foolish not to attempt to tap into the opportunities provided by the hosting of the Fifa Football World Cup and the associated extra school holidays, etc. However, following on from the information coming out of the media of tickets and accommodation being returned by the foreign tour operators, I have taken a conservative approach in budgeting for a financial windfall from the World Cup. If we do get a significant cash injection over the period then this will be seen as a bonus, but the club's financial position has not been made dependent on this happening.

Another major challenge facing the club this year is the hosting of the main Women's IPT in October this year. Obviously, we will draw heavily on the experience gained during the Mid-Amateur event last year, but this will be on an even larger scale and will include significant television coverage. One of the challenges facing the new committee will undoubtedly be to ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that the event is a success and runs smoothly. I know that the sub-committee including GNGU representatives and members of Irene's Ladies Golf Committee are already hard at work making sure that all the necessary arrangements are in place for the hosting of a memorable tournament. One of the tangible benefits that has accrued to the club through the hosting of these provincial tournaments has been the improved relationship with the Executive of the Gauteng North Golf Union. Irene is now seen as one of the venues of choice for the hosting of important tournaments, which not only brings in reasonable revenues to the club, but more importantly serves as an advertising medium of our offering to the best

amateur golfers in the province and the rest of South Africa. As an aside, I have recently been co-opted onto the GNGU Executive Committee and will be standing for election at that body's AGM on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May.

No report of this nature would be complete without including a heartfelt word of thanks to those whose hard work made the past year so enjoyable and rewarding. A special word of mention must go to the two ladies on the committee this year, Jan Jenkins and Yzette Terreblanche. Jan has put a huge amount of time and effort into ensuring that the caddies at the club are properly trained and equipped. Obviously there is still more work to be done, but there is no doubt that a huge amount of progress has been made. Yzette has undoubtedly been the most efficient member of the Golf Committee during the past year. She always has all the relevant information available and was a constant source of good ideas during our meetings. She also ably led the ladies section and is clearly on top of the challenge of hosting the IPT later in the year. Anton van Wyk has done a huge amount of work both in organising tournaments and ensuring that the manicuring of the golf course is up to scratch. Russell Page was co-opted onto the committee late in the year, but his enthusiasm and sound ideas have benefited all of us in the time he has been part of our deliberations.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board and the staff of Irene Country Club for their efforts in supporting myself and the Golf Committee during the last year. Lorna Coleman must be singled out for special mention for the dedication she has exhibited under extremely trying circumstances – I cannot thank her enough for the work she has done.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion I wish the incoming Golf Committee all the best for a new year that offers plenty of challenges, but just as many opportunities.

Yours in golf,

Paul

Paul Davel  
Golf Captain – Irene Country Club