



BY
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SGA APPOINTS MATT BALLARD AS FULL-TIME NATIONAL COACH

QUEENSLANDER COMES WITH BIG REPUTATION
TO DRIVE HIGH-PERFORMANCE GOLF

It was encouraging that the Singapore team, with a relatively new slate of players, finished third in the recent Putra Cup in Myanmar.

Much credit for that goes to the three part-time coaches, Scott Barr, Justin Han and Goh Kun Yang who, despite their fulltime jobs, devoted time and effort to raise the playing standards of Singapore's leading amateurs.



Considering the added time and effort the Singapore Golf Association would like to focus in their High-Performance Programme, it has hired renowned Australian coach Matt Ballard, as Full-Time National Coach, to continue driving national and junior golf development.

The SGA is currently in the development process of nurturing new talent and grooming young golfers. And believing that Ballard, with his vast experience, can help in its High-Performance Programme by taking over a fresh team of golfers from the National, Development and Junior squads.

Ballard (above, right), 41, comes with a big reputation, having worked for numerous years with Tour players like Adam Scott, Michael Sim, Adam Bland and Sam Brazel.

He was also one of the coaches for Golf Queensland's High Performance Programme and coached at the Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club in the Gold Coast.

Having been involved with the development and execution of training programmes for juniors, elite amateurs and professionals, Ballard looks a perfect fit for the SGA's plans.

A former player himself, he was a past captain of the Queensland State amateur golf team and member of the Australian National Squad. He had also played on the Australasia and Japan Tours as a professional.

Ballard: "I saw the youngsters at one tournament, and I was impressed. I believe I can work with the various squads and hopefully things work out fine during my stint here."

"Our selection committee sieved through over 50 applications from Singapore and all over the world. We spent days conducting Live and Skype interviews with the shortlisted candidates. We also have had the two final candidates flown in to Singapore as part of the final interview process.

"We are confident that Matt will work with our players' individual coaches and, together, develop our talented golfers in Singapore. I am convinced that with Matt's coaching background and personality, he will be a great asset for SGA and our golfers," said SGA Vice-President and Chairperson Training and Development committee Lyn Sen.

SGA General Manager Jerome Ng added: "Further development of the High-Performance training pro-

gramme is still the most important task. One of Matt's main tasks will be the realisation of existing strategic plans for the period leading into SEA Games and to nurture young talent.

"At the same time, to implement an effective training and preparation programme that would best facilitate our experienced and young golfers alike.

Following the successful conclusion of the SMBC Singapore Open last week, local professional also former National Squad member Johnson Poh and National amateur golfer James Leow finished tied 38th and 69th respectively.

It is an exciting time ahead as the SGA forges its long-term plans to grow the sport and develop Singapore into a leading golfing nation in South-East Asia.

ANDRE AND CALLISTA SMASH THEIR WAY TO VICTORY

Every time we reflect on past Singapore Opens, there is banter and a buoyant mood about 2007 winner Angel Cabrera and the big drives he hit that week.

The massive Cabrera, from Argentina and one of the longest-hitters on the PGA Tour, would be proud to hear that a Singaporean teenager smashed a 324.3-metre drive at the inaugural SGA Long Drive Challenge last week.

Held in conjunction with the Discover Golf Carnival, Andre, 17, easily claimed the Boys' Junior Amateur title with that solid whack.

In fact, the Development Squad player's drive was the longest across all categories.

Andre said "I usually hit it to about 280 metres, but today I just tried to give it a bit more by hitting really big hooks for more hang time and roll.

"I have been spending a lot of time in the gym. I can see that it has paid off. I have gained about 20 metres off the tee."

However, Andre cautioned: "Just because I can hit the ball far doesn't mean that I am guaranteed to score

well. I still need to work on my short iron and wedges to do well."

Callista Chen, 20, one of Singapore's female amateurs, hit the longest drive by a female, recording a 239.3m tee shot in the final. Although this was a few metres short of her best drive in the qualifying round, the drive was good enough to secure her the win in the Ladies' Mid-Amateur Category. "It's definitely an honour to win this title. In the final round I was trying to be relaxed, reminding myself to just turn through the shot and give it my best hit."

Like Andre, Callista credits her prodigious length off the tee to her fitness regimen over the years, saying, "Our programme implemented a lot of fitness training to improve agility, strength and stability. We did a lot of sprinting, planks and medicine ball throwing and even boxing at one point. I didn't understand it back then, but as I get older, I realised that these fitness games and activities helped me gain physical strength and increased my club head speed."

Golfers vied for the coveted title of Singapore's Long Drive Champion in

three separate categories: the Junior Amateur (18 years and under), the Mid-Amateur (19 to 49 years) and the Senior Amateur (50 years and above).

In the Senior category, the Men's and Women's titles went to the Sen couple, Jiten and Lyn. They recorded a total distance of 259.8m and 201.9m respectively in the finals.

The Discover Golf Carnival, jointly organised with Lagardère Sports and Totts Golf, featured a fun-filled extravaganza of golf-themed activities.

The Kids Zone proved to be an instant hit with innovative challenges that included Golf Bowling, Bullseye Putt-Putt, Tic Tac Putt and Foot Golf, while the skills challenge booths like the Pitching Bullseye Target, Long Putt Challenge and Chip In For Arc Challenge put the more experienced golfers to the test.

The carnival was a perfect opportunity to introduce the game of golf to the uninitiated. Ken Lim, 43, who brought his three children to the event, said: "I am interested to expose them to golf to see whether they have a liking for it and before I start them on golf

lessons."

Mrs Chaw, who came with her sons (Chaw Liang, 14, Chaw Zheng, 12, and Chaw Sheng, 10), said: "My boys have been playing golf for two years now. It is a wonderful game. It helps them to focus and also trains up their patience."

The carnival, now into its third edition, first started as a lead-up event to last year's SMBC Singapore Open in 2018. The second edition of the event was held at the Mandai Executive Golf Course last September. — Godfrey Robert

RESULTS (winners received a Taylor-Made Driver to be specially fitted):

Boys' Junior: 1 Andre Chong (324.3m). 2 Brandon Han (311.4m). 3 Sean Lee (296.9m). **Girls' Junior:** 1 Shang Yu (223.4m). 2 Angel Lim (223.3m). 3 Maya Cala (217.5m). **Men's Senior:** 1 Dr Jiten Sen (259.8m). 2 Ivan Hoyes (247.6m). 3 Scott Roberts (174.4m). **Women's Senior:** 1 Lyn Sen (201.9m). 2 Emily Lee (186.3m). 3 Belinda Young (176.9m). **Men's Mid-Amateur:** 1 Low Wee Jin (304.8m). 2 Erwyn Lam (302.3m). 3 Lucius Toh (300.4m). **Women's Mid-Amateur:** 1 Callista Chen (239.3m). 2 Clara Ang (218.4m).

photo courtesy of Singapore Golf Association