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'Coaching children is a very rewarding part of a golf professional's job'



(MENAFN - Gulf Times) 'Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots; you get good breaks from bad shots — but you have to play the ball where it lies.'

These words of Bobby Jones, the greatest amateur golfer of all time and one of the most influential figures in the history of the sport, gives us a glimpse into the many life lessons the game of golf is steeped with. All the better then if one starts playing the sport when young.

Nestled in the pristine environs of the Doha Golf Club, Qatar Golf Academy (QGA) truly provides, as they put it, 'a welcoming and friendly environment for all to discover and enjoy the game of golf. Currently, the QGA runs several children's programmes at the Doha Golf Club, chief of which are their Junior Development Programme and a separate schools programme in which they teach around 100 children every week the golf course is open, thereby inculcating the love and passion for golf at an early age.

QGA is also playing a crucial part in the upcoming 20th Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, which will witness the world's top golfers compete on Doha Golf Club's 'unique and challenging desert-type Championship Course from January 26 to 29.

Since 1998, the prestigious Qatar Masters golf tournament has been hosted by Doha Golf Club at the beginning of each year as part of The European Tour. As for the tickets for the 20th Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, they are available for purchase at Virgin Megastores (online and in-store in Doha), Doha Golf Club, St Regis Hotel Doha, Intercontinental Hotel Doha, Radisson Blu Hotel Doha, FNAC Lagoona Mall and online at atq-tickets.com, 800tickets.com & iloveqatar.net.

Designed by **Peter Harradine** and unveiled in 1997, the 7,374-yard Championship Course has proven to be one of the longest par 72 courses on The Tour. The public village will be running with various golf-related activities and a mini golf area located on their bowling green. Community caught up with Chris Nicolls, Director of QGA and Head Teaching Professional, for a chat to know more.

What are some of the highlights of the various children's programmes offered by the QGA?

Here at Doha Golf Club we run three main junior coaching programmes throughout the golfing season starting in September and running through to June. We have up to 200 children visiting the Golf Club on a weekly basis for coaching sessions. Our junior development programme is a grass roots coaching system aimed at children from the age of five to 16 of all standards from beginners to advanced level.

We also run a Schools Extracurricular Programme with various schools around Doha introducing children to the game and explaining how beneficial the sport is for a child's wellbeing and social

skills. Finally, we run a programme called the Doha Oilmen's Academy. This is a structured coaching programme aimed at elite junior golfers that currently play at the golf club with the aim of getting them to compete in national and worldwide tournaments.

How much fun and challenging can it be to teach this sport to children?

All of the junior coaching programmes are based around getting children to enjoy the game of golf as much as possible while helping them to improve their technique and playing ability. We have structured these sessions to incorporate fun whilst also being able to focus on improvement in motor coordination skills and interaction with other children during each coaching session targeting whatever the junior's ability level is. Coaching children is a very rewarding part of a golf professional's job. It's great to see so much willingness to learn and improve in every lesson.

What kind of feedback has the mini golf area and other interactive golf-related activities at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters received in the previous edition?

The Village area at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters is abuzz with hype and activity, being one of the busiest areas throughout the week of the tournament. The area showcases a variety of golf-related activities for children including Mini golf and Snag golf areas that are relevant to children of all ages. The children are able to benefit from a quick introduction to the sport of Golf in a fun interactive environment. The feedback provided from parents and sponsors after every tournament is always very positive. The area remains busy throughout the entire tournament, attracting a lot of happy participants. Parents feel reassured knowing their children can play and learn about the game in a safe, controlled environment.

In what way do you see such features enhancing the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters experience this time around?

The Village at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters is the perfect area to allow Doha Golf Club to host an event for not just lovers of golf but for the whole family and non-golfers alike to attend and enjoy. Every year we strive to add value and improvement to the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters experience by reaching out to the community and getting my people, more schools and more social groups involved, especially those who have not had chance to experience golf previously. The Village area at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters is the perfect way to get a taste of what the sport is about and how beneficial it can be to a person's lifestyle.

What would you say are the three main benefits of learning golf from a very young age?

At the Doha Golf Club, we pride ourselves on promoting a healthy active lifestyle within all our junior coaching sessions. Golf has various physical, mental and emotional benefits for children of all ages that help not only when playing the sport but in other life scenarios. Some of the main physical benefits we see children develop whilst coaching are greater strength and flexibility, improved co-ordination and improved balance. There certainly are notable benefits for children if they start at a younger age, such as increased self-confidence, greater self-belief and improved self-discipline.