

Homegrown talent



2008 intake: Ed and Alex Peters at Wellington College

Now in their third year, The Duke of York Sports Foundation Scholarships in association with Wellington College, are seeking to nurture and develop Britain's young golfing talent within these shores rather than overseas

If the Race to Dubai has helped to stem the steady flow of Europe's finest across the Atlantic, then the Duke of York is hoping his Sports Foundation Academic and Golf Sponsorships will do the same for some of Europe's brightest young golfing prospects. Frustrated at the limited opportunities in this country for promising juniors to pursue both their golfing and educational aspirations, he set up the scholarships in 2007 in conjunction with world-renowned Wellington College in Berkshire whose many attributes include a Donald Steel and Martin Ebert-designed nine-hole layout and a handy proximity to some of the Home Counties' finest inland courses.

First to receive the award in 2007 was Sam Williams, now 15, from Twyford in Berkshire, whose subsequent handicap cut from 5 to 4 is almost certainly the trickle before the flood according to his mentors. Master in charge of golf at Wellington, Iain Henderson, explains: "Sam has grown physically a lot over the past few months and has had to make some technical changes in his swing, which will enable him to progress over the coming years. His handicap has come down to 4 and is expected to continue

downwards this year." These thoughts are echoed by the pupil himself: "I came to Wellington as a weedy boy with little knowledge of golf. All I knew was how to get the ball in the hole. Now, a year and a half on, my body has developed and my knowledge has developed. I feel the closest I have ever felt to achieving what I set out to do. With the support of Mr Henderson and our coach, Jason Brant, I'm sure it will not be long before I'm swinging like Tiger!" A successful defence of the Wales U15 Open crown, and strong academic progress were among Sam's 2008 highlights.

Fellow scholar in 2007's initial intake was Murray Rose from Sudbury in Suffolk, another 15-year-old who has seen his handicap drop to 4, and who has made good academic progress as a budding linguist. Murray too has been making swing changes under the guidance of Jason Brant, PGA pro at East Berkshire Golf Club, and Henderson is confident this will soon bear much fruit. "Murray will see the result of that effort in the coming months and years," says Henderson. "He's now beginning to harness his immense physical talent and has grown up hugely as a golfer." Murray himself is effusive about the opportunity his scholarship has provided: "It is an honour and privilege to be here. For

Words: Jeremy Ellwood | Photography: Paul Severn

me, the golf and academic mix presents no problems and seems to be integrated to the maximum at Wellington. I realise how lucky I am to be hopefully on my next stepping stone to success."

Towards the end of 2008, Sam and Murray were joined by brother and sister, Edward and Alex Peters, both plus-figure juniors from Notts (Hollinwell) and Beeston Fields Golf Clubs. Older brother Edward plays off +1, is a member of the England U16 Boys' team, and is the only Nottinghamshire youngster to have won all six of the county's age group titles from U11 to U21. Last year he won the Independent Schools Golf Association (ISGA) title at Collingtree Park in Northants with a gross 73. But while Edward's golf is undoubtedly blossoming, Henderson is equally pleased with his progress in the classroom: "Ed has shown a truly exemplary attitude and approach. He is ambitious academically and shows a lot of potential." Edward too gives the impression that he is enjoying every aspect of life at Wellington. "The Duke of York Scholarships to Wellington have given golfers like myself the chance to receive the very best education

while practising and playing," he enthuses. "From good grades to winning the ISGA strokeplay championship, every moment has been a moment to savour."

No doubt healthy sibling rivalry will see Edward keen to match or better younger sister Alex's handicap. The 15-year-old, who last year became the youngest ever winner of the Ladies' Nottinghamshire County Championship, recently got cut to +2 and became a member of the full England Ladies' squad. Heady stuff, but Henderson is keen to stress that Alex has not allowed such tender-age success to go to her head: "Settling into her first year, Alex has had a great start overall. Work has gone well, social integration is excellent and she has been a total delight to work with."

Prince Andrew is, of course, confident that this is only the beginning and is delighted that the recent introduction of an International Baccalaureate at Wellington College means scholarship opportunities can now be extended to both UK and European players. Anyone who meets the College's required academic standards, and who displays the necessary golfing aptitude and potential can be considered for a scholarship, with applicants selected on a case by case basis. **GM**

POTENTIAL SCHOLARS

If you think you, or someone you know aged 13 to 18, would be an ideal candidate for one of the 2009 scholarships, you'll find full details at www.doy-champions.com, following the links for "Sports Foundation" and "Golf Scholarships".



Wellington's Iain Henderson with all four DOY scholars



Henderson watches over siblings Edward and Alex Peters

DUKE OF YORK YOUNG CHAMPIONS TROPHY

The Duke of York Sports Foundation Scholarships are far from Prince Andrew's only commitment to junior golf. In 2001, with expert assistance from John Simpson, Nick Faldo's former right-hand man, he established an international 54-hole strokeplay invitational for under 18s called the Young Champions Trophy.

The event, which like the Open Championship is always played over one of the UK's finest links, has gone from strength to strength, with the average handicap last year an impressive +1. It's run like a full professional tournament to give the youngsters a glimpse of what the future might hold, and is not only sanctioned by the R&A, but also eligible for World Amateur Golf Ranking points.

The first five events were staged at Royal Liverpool (2001, 2002), Castletown (2003, 2005) and Kingsbarns (2004), but its home since 2006 has been Dundonald on the Ayrshire coast, to where it returns this September before venturing south in 2010 to Royal St George's on the Kent coast.

Last year 51 competitors from 28 countries took part, with Japan, Israel and Thailand represented for the first time. England's Stiggy Hodgson won the Trophy, with Holland's Marieke Nivard the leading girl. Who knows what the future may hold for them given that European Tour star Oliver Fisher was the 2005 champion, and Tour winners Pablo Martin and a certain Rory McIlroy finished runner-up in the preceding two years.



2005 winner, Oliver Fisher, with Prince Andrew

FUTURE VENUES AND DATES

2009 – Dundonald Links, Ayrshire – September 8-10

2010 – Royal St George's, Kent – September 7-9

2011 – Royal Liverpool, Wirral – September 6-8 (TBC)

For more information, log onto www.doy-champions.com



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