



HISTORY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The history of golf in Trinidad and Tobago dates back to October 1891, when this country was part of the British Empire. A group of local interested golfers formed themselves into a club, St. Andrew's, and were granted permission to establish their club in the Queen's Park Savannah. By this time the Savannah was already well established as the centre of recreation for the residents of Port of Spain and its environs, who gathered there on afternoons and weekends for horse racing, cricket and football. It must have been quite a sight with the 1st tee inside the race track, not to mention that the 2nd was a dog leg in which a miss hit effort to cut the corner landed you out of bounds in the Savannah's famous cemetery. Furthermore, the playing of golf also has to be pictured amidst the grazing of cattle which caused the club to have to fence the greens in with barbed wire! These were the scenes against which the first "Trinidad Amateur Championship" was played in 1907.

This Championship was hosted by the St. Andrews Golf Club from 1907 until 1942 when World War II caused the tournament not to be played in 1943, 1944 and 1945. The restoration of peace facilitated the resumption of the championship in 1946 and it has continued without interruption to the present day. While the tournament has at times been hosted at Pointe a Pierre and Tobago in the years since 1945, the history of this Championship is indelibly intertwined with the history of St. Andrews Golf Club. The club last hosted the Championship at the Savannah in 1919 and then relocated to nearby St. James where the course extended to the north and west towards the Mounted Branch of the Constabulary. The club further moved to Fairways, Maraval in 1934 on completion of the first nine of the new course, with the second nine being completed in 1938. The club is now settled in its present location in Moka, Maraval since December 1974 when the back nine was opened for the Christmas Hamper. The front nine was completed in May 1975.

Over the years, more golf courses were established with Usine Ste. Madeleine being the second oldest club, having being established in 1900 by the then Ste. Madeleine Sugar Company of England.

Brechin Castle Golf Course was designed and built by W.S. Fulton and Ram Goberdhan in 1927 and is set in the middle of sugar cane fields. Mr. Fulton was a golfer and employed as a chemist at the nearby Brechin Castle Sugar Cane Factory and Mr. Goberdhan, who came from India in 1917 with his parents, also worked at the sugar cane factory. The course started out with 9 holes and was increased to an 18-hole course in 1929/1930, but by 1938 nine holes had been reclaimed by the sugar cane factory when sugar cane crops were planted on the site and a few houses were also built on it.

The first nine holes were established at the Pointe-a-Pierre Golf Course in 1938 by expatriates who worked at the Oil Refinery but this was soon abandoned because of World War II. After the War, in 1947, another attempt was made and a nine-hole course was established. In the 1950's approval was granted to add another nine holes to the course and work was completed in 1960.

Chaguaramas Golf Course was built by American servicemen during their occupation of the Chaguaramas peninsula in World War II. This nine-hole course is located on the former Macqueripe Tonka Bean Estate and is sheltered by the spectacular Edith Waterfall.

Mount Irvine Golf Course was designed by Commander John D. Harris and established in 1968. It is one of two golf courses in Tobago and was selected in 1969 to host one of the tournaments in the famous film and TV series "Shell's Wonderful World of Golf". It has also hosted the Johnnie Walker International Pro-Am.

Plantations Golf Course is located in Lowlands, Tobago. It was designed by Bob Hunt and Marcus Blackburn and first opened its doors on March 16, 2002.

The latest addition to the golf courses in this country is the Millennium Lakes Golf and Country Club which is situated in Trincity and was opened on March 1, 2006.

There have also been a number of golf courses which have opened and closed their doors over the years. The Penal Golf Course was opened in 1954 and closed in 1974. Clifton Hill Golf Course, located at the Shell Camp in Point Fortin, was established in the early 40's and closed in the 80's, Palo Seco Golf Course was opened in 1957 and closed in 1968.

Trinidad & Tobago has contributed significantly to the history of golf in the region. In fact, the Hoerman Cup was first played between Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica in 1957 and was responsible for the evolution of what is now the Caribbean Amateur Golf Championship, the premier amateur event on the region's golfing calendar.

The Trinidad Golf Union came into existence around the same time that the first Trinidad Amateur Championship was played and became what is now the Trinidad & Tobago Golf Association in the late 1950's.

There have been many outstanding players and administrators throughout the tenure of the game in Trinidad & Tobago. Stephen Ames is by far the most successful golfer to ever play the game in this country but history is rife with names of players who have left their mark through outstanding performances, amazing longevity and sheer dedication to the development of the sport.

A look at the winners of the Trinidad & Tobago Open Amateur Golf Championship brings some of these names to the fore. E.C Wilson won the very first Championship in 1907 and was clearly the best player in the country at that time as he successfully defended his title in 1908 and won again in 1910.

H.A. de Boissiere won the Championship on seven occasions, a standing record, yet to be broken. He had the distinction of first winning in 1919, the last year the Open was played at the Savannah. He proceeded to defend his title on the new course in St. James in 1920, then won again in 1924, 1926, 1927, 1929 and 1931.

Another dominant player was W.S. Fulton who won the Championship no less than six times: 1936, 1937, 1939, 1940, 1950 and 1951.

John Sellier won the Championship five times in 1954, 1957, 1959, 1961 and 1962. He has the distinction, not only of being in the elite group of amateurs to win the Open more than three times, but also has been the person largely responsible for preserving the history of St. Andrew's Golf Club and by extension, golf as a whole in Trinidad and Tobago.

Robert Grell picked up where John Sellier left off, winning in 1963, 1966, 1968, 1972 and then lifted the trophy one last time seven years later in 1979. He also has the distinction of playing in the first Hoerman Cup Tournament in 1957 and the 50th anniversary tournament in Santo Domingo in 2007. An amazing achievement!

The 1980s saw the emergence of Robert Charlett as the dominant player. He won the Championship five times in eight years: 1983, 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1991.

The mantle was then passed to Carlos "Sexy" Baynes who was undeniably the outstanding player of the 1990s, lifting the trophy on his own five times as well: 1992, 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2001, and sharing the honours with young Ben Martin in 2007.

Edward "Teddy" Grell and Cliff Hinds were also outstanding, both lifting the trophy three times.

Ben Martin represents the new era in local golf. He is presently the three time defending champion of the Open having first won the title in 2006 at the tender age of 15. He is also the new holder of the record for the lowest score in the Caribbean Amateur Golf Championship, posting a remarkable 64 in the 2008 edition played in the Cayman Islands.

In the professional ranks George "Brothers" Phillips stands out as one of our more naturally talented players. He turned pro in 1964 and played in competition against Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman and Seve Ballesteros. In 1973 he represented Trinidad & Tobago at the World Cup, he won the Barclays open in 1975, beating a field of 25 overseas pros, and in 1977 was nominated for the 1976 Sportsman of the Year, which was won by Hasely Crawford.

Our most accomplished golfer however is Stephen Ames who is currently ranked 36th on the PGA Tour and enjoyed his best ranking when he was one of the top 20 golfers in the world in late 2004. In his Hoerman Cup debut at the age of 16 in 1980, he smashed the course record at Sandy Lane, Barbados with a six-under-par total of 66. He turned professional in 1987 and in 1997 he finished third at the PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament to play for the first time on the PGA Tour in 1998. To date, he has 3 wins on the PGA Tour and career earnings of over US\$ 15 million. He is also the Trinidad & Tobago Sportsman of The Year for the last two years.

In the field of golf coaching, Fitzroy Rudder, Victor Alexander and Carlton Faustin are in a league of their own. Carlton Faustin, at the age of 78, is still a teaching professional, having taught the game for a total of 56 years in different territories; 10 in Guyana, 2 in Barbados, 8 at the Chaguaramas Naval Base and the last 36 in Tobago.

There are many other contributors to the development of the sport in Trinidad & Tobago and, what is certain, is that the future of golf in this country has a solid foundation on which to build on.