

## Results of Junior Golf Survey

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In collaboration with the Ottawa Valley Golf Association (OVGA), I undertook a survey of club captains in 2006 to better understand how men's night activities were organized at various clubs. The results were used to revise men's night activities at my previous course with great success. We were able to grow and maintain men's night from 20 to 50 participants. The results of that survey are available [online](#).

I was also interested in seeking ways to encourage participation and enjoyment of golf by juniors. I proposed a second survey about junior golf to Don McGee, current Men's Tournaments Director and a Past-President of the OVGA. Don kindly obtained Board approval for the survey to be conducted in collaboration with the OVGA. Rick Henderson, OVGA Office Manager, handled the logistics of emailing my survey to OVGA contacts and forwarding the replies to me as they were received (removing email addresses to maintain the privacy of respondents).

This survey sought to understand how different clubs organize and manage their junior activities. The objective was to summarize what other clubs were doing and to share the results with member clubs. My hope was to gain some insights into what works well, and by so doing, contribute to junior activities and programs at eQuinelle as well as at other clubs in the area.

This survey is simply a starting point for those who want to improve participation by juniors and enhance their enjoyment of the game. In the final analysis, it is the golf course staff and interested members of each course who make such activities a success.

I thank everyone who took the time to share their ideas and experience. Your input was very much appreciated.

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The survey was distributed through the OVGA in early August 2013 to 136 captains (75 men, 61 women), 15 others (OVGA reps), and 12 junior captains (men, women, and juniors). As of the end of October, replies had been received from 14 people. Not everyone answered every question and in some case cases more than one response was provided; therefore, the number of responses does not always total 14. Although the number of responses was low, the results do point out some common themes that may be a help to those interested in improving junior golf programs.

**Table 1.** Type of golf course.

Private	Semi-Private	Public
3	7	4

Replies were received from a range of private, semi-private, and public courses (Table 1). Given the small sample size of respondents, replies from all course types were grouped. There may be differences in approach among the different types of courses, but there appear to be more common elements with regard to developing and promoting junior golf.

**Table 2.** Number of members (including juniors).

More than 300	200-300	100-200	Fewer than 100
7	2	1	4

**Table 3.** Total number of junior golfers.

More than 50	30-50	15-30	Fewer than 15
5	3	1	5

**Table 4.** Number of male and female junior members.

Males	Females	Total	Males (%)
415	62	477	87

The total number of members (including juniors) varied among the courses from in excess of 300 to fewer than 100 (Table 2). The total numbers of junior golfers, and breakdown between male and female junior members, are shown in Tables 3 and 4. Clearly, there is a huge difference in the proportion of male and female junior golfers. **Male juniors constitute more than 85% of all junior golfers** at the 12 clubs that provided numerical replies to this question. One course suggested that the ratio was between 80% and 90% male, and the other course did not provide a reply.

**All courses have special rates for junior golfers.** Costs for junior memberships ranged from \$100 to \$600 per year, with the average rate for a yearly membership being \$315 among the 14 courses. In comparison, regular memberships at these courses ranged in price from \$1000 to \$5400, with an average of \$2100 for a full membership. At all but one of the courses, juniors do not have to be children of members. One course reported that junior members must be children (or grandchildren) of members.

About **half of the courses have restrictions on when juniors can play.** Six clubs reported that there are no playing time restrictions for junior golfers, although in one case it was reported that juniors must play with an adult member. The restrictions on junior golfers include both time of day and day of the week: (1) no tee times between 4:15 pm and 7:00 pm on weekdays, or until after 2:00 pm on weekends and holidays; (2) not before

1:30 pm on weekends; (3) on weekdays juniors may tee off before noon, and on weekends and holidays after 1:00 pm; (4) after 11:00 am weekends and holidays and not between 15:30 and 16:30 on weekdays; (5) anytime Monday to Friday, but after 12:00 pm weekends and holidays; (6) no play before 13:00 pm on weekends and holidays, unless the junior in question is an "A" class player; and (7) juniors may not obtain weekend starting times until 11:00 am on Friday.

At most courses, **juniors are also not permitted to participate in men’s or ladies’ nights**. Four courses allow juniors to participate in these activities; however, the other ten courses exclude juniors. Several reasons were provided: there is limited space and often waiting lists for participation among regular members; the consumption of alcohol associated with these events; juniors have their own league; and some adults do not like the youngsters hitting the ball farther or scoring better than them, regardless of handicap factors.

Respondents were asked whether their courses had any **concerns about “liability” issues** regarding junior members spending the day at the course without adult supervision. Only two courses reported having concerns; however, one person noted that the course is definitely not a babysitting service. One person noted that all children under 12 years of age must have adult supervision at all times while at the golf course. Another respondent noted that to date, no issues have arisen, but that they could perhaps in the future.

**Table 5.** Programs and activities for junior golfers.

Lessons	Clinics	Tournaments	Junior Nights	Other Activities
5	8	9	2	7

**Most courses have several activities tailored to the needs of junior golfers**

(Table 5). Lessons and clinics, as well as tournaments just for juniors (including club

championships), were the most common activities. One course has a junior day (not night), and one course has a 9-hole junior league that is open to members and the public (includes 10 members and 30 non-members). One course reported that they had a junior scholarship program, and another mentioned that junior group lessons were provided by the golf professional. Another course reported that they have opening and closing tournaments, junior intersectionals, in-house match play, a junior/adult tournament, and club championships (in 4 age groups). Three of the courses noted under “other activities” that they had no programs at their courses for juniors. In addition, **about 40% of courses have junior clubs available to rent** (6 reported having junior clubs and 8 did not have any for rent).

**Table 6.** Responsibility for junior programs.

Club Captain	Junior Captain	Golf Pro or Assistant	Other
0	6	8	6

**junior golf**; however, in other courses responsibility lies with a junior captain or other volunteer (especially in courses that have no full-time professional). Among the “other” replies were junior chairperson and junior coordinator, who most likely assume very similar roles to the junior captain at other courses. One respondent noted that he/she was a volunteer who worked with the Board of Directors, two clubs replied that responsibility rested with “management”, and two respondents indicated that no one was responsible for junior activities at their courses.

Responsibility for junior golf programs and activities varies among the different clubs (see Table 6). Most commonly, the **golf professional or assistant assumes responsibility for**

**Table 7.** Frequency of junior clinics and lessons.

Once a Week	Once a Month	Once or Twice During Season	Other
3	1	2	8

**The frequency and cost of junior clinics and lessons varies considerably.**

Table 7 shows the reported frequency of junior golf clinics and lessons. Three clubs run weekly clinics. One course reported weekly clinics in June and July; another that the professional sets the schedule and it varies from week to week over the

summer. Within the “other” category, one club mentioned that they hold two week-long junior camps during the summer. Another respondent noted that private lessons could be arranged with the professional at any time, but response was poor. However, three volunteer-run clinics/lessons held at the beginning of the season at this club usually attract 4 to 8 new junior members. Three courses reported that no clinics or lessons were given.

**Table 8.** Cost of junior clinics and lessons.

More than \$50	\$25 to \$50	Less than \$25	Free	Other
3	3	0	6	2

**Costs of junior clinics and lessons varied in cost from free to in excess of \$50.**

Several comments were included with the replies. One respondent noted that juniors received lessons for half the

normal rate from the professional. At two clubs, the cost of lessons and clinics for juniors are included in the cost of membership or league fees. One club distinguished between clinics and lessons by noting that clinics were free, but private lessons were charged. One respondent noted that their professional offered clinics once a week during July and August; another noted that week-long golf camps were offered at their club for \$145, and ran from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and were followed by lunch. One

person organizes free clinics as part of his/her personal contribution to the club.

**Table 8.** Perceived success of junior golf programs or activities.

Very Successful	Successful	Somewhat Successful	Not Very Successful
4	1	5	4

**Junior programs range quite widely in their perceived success.** Five of the respondents rated their programs as being “very successful” or “successful”. However, nine people felt their programs were only “somewhat

successful” or “not very successful”.

**Several methods are used to promote junior programs and activities.**

Two courses reported placing posters at hockey arenas and local schools; five reported placing advertisements in local newspapers. The majority (eight) advertise in their club newsletter or within the golf course. Among the other methods used, email distribution, word of mouth among juniors and other members, and the club website were cited. None of the clubs use contacts or promotion through local youth organizations.

Respondents were near unanimous in suggesting that **fun is the single most important aspect for making junior programs a success.** Some of the specific comments were: have a fun, varied program that caters to all levels of skill from beginners to advanced juniors; have a core of children who will play with each other in an environment where they can improve; have fun and become engaged; let them have fun and play with others around their same age and calibre; get parents to buy into the program; make it safe, fun, and informative; have fun and get juniors on the course to play; recruit good volunteers and have support from the Board and the general membership; identify a 30-something year old Mom or Dad willing to teach; and allow the kids to have fun, and spend time with them on both the course and the range. One respondent provided and expanded reply: make it fun ... we have two coordinators and one volunteer member who work with the kids (7 to 13) in our junior league. They do different games that involve putting and chipping, but add some twists with hula hoops and different rule variations. The juniors really enjoy this. In their weekly 9-hole round we switch up the game each week and tie it into the pre-golf contests. Formats include scramble, most/least putts, and play one hole with our coordinator.

As a counter-point to these keys to success, respondents were asked what the single most limiting factor was to junior programs. Responses were varied, but **lack of time and commitment by both juniors and volunteers were cited as the major impediments to success.** Some of the specific comments included: junior fundraising is important to maintain a vigorous program, and the key to this fundraising is a 50/50

draw held during men's nights that supports the lesson program, junior in-club events, and the junior out-of-town team; lack of promotion at the community level; kids are too busy with other activities; juniors who do not get involved with what the program offers as they have too many other outside commitments; and the children often have other summer interests and play other sports; therefore, time is the problem. At some clubs, the problem lies with not having anybody to lead junior programs or generally not being able to find volunteers.

Concerns over commitment were summarized by one respondent in this way. It is hard to get the children and their parents to respond to information. They constantly need chasing, and it gets very time consuming. The ones who love golf are in everything, and they play, play, play. Fringe players need to be gently persuaded to get involved. Once the bug hits, things work better. The better the experience you can give them, the better player and future member they become. Get them involved with the adults.

**Several suggestions about how to organize and promote junior golf programs arise from this survey:**

- Reduced membership rates for juniors and “subsidized” rates for junior golf clinics are common approaches used to encourage junior golfers.
- There needs to be one person who is the focal point at the course for junior golfers. When available this person is usually the golf professional, but many successful activities can also be undertaken by dedicated volunteer members.
- Organized clinics, junior camps during the summer, tournaments for juniors, and junior days are all used to encourage junior golfers and teach the game and its etiquette.
- Although participation in men's and ladies' nights may not be feasible, activities that encourage junior golfers to play with adult members might be encouraged. Adult-junior tournaments are one possibility, but members might also be encouraged to invite juniors to play with them or to “mentor” younger golfers.
- Junior golfers need to have the opportunity to play on the course as well as hit balls and do drills at a practice area. Games on the golf course, which reinforce lessons and encourage fun and participation, are the most successful.

- Less than half of the courses have junior golf clubs for rent. Perhaps some courses could invest in a few sets of junior clubs.
- Members of mens' and ladies' nights might become involved in fund raising for junior programs and activities, the purchase of junior clubs, or perhaps local scholarships. Not only might needed funds be generated, but mentorship arrangements might also be encouraged.
- There is a huge difference in the numbers of male and female junior golfers. Given the recent success of some prominent junior female golfers in the area, and the expansion of female hockey, there is scope to focus efforts on creating more interest among young females.
- Additional methods may be needed to promote local junior golf programs. In addition to advertising via club newsletters, posters, and emails, some courses might consider expanding their promotion to include local schools, sports associations, and service clubs.
- Finally, the focus of junior activities must be on having fun while teaching the skills and etiquette of the game. These activities must be both on the practice grounds as well as the golf course to engage and maintain interest.

Hopefully, these comments and suggestions will help others who are seeking to improve their junior golf programs. My hope is that the results of this survey will inspire you to think of other ways to nurture existing programs, revitalize programs that may need help, or initiate programs where none now exist. Junior golfers are the key to future growth of the game. With some effort from each of us, that growth can be encouraged and nurtured among the boys and girls at our golf courses.

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