

SOUTH AFRICAN BLIND GOLF ASSOCIATION (SABGA)

IBPS Handa Vision Cup (International Team Matchplay) – 2017

Creston, British Columbia, Canada hosted the 3rd edition of the ISPS HANDA Vision Cup from 21-23 July 2017. The Vision Cup is the IBGA's version of the famous Ryder Cup featuring two 12-person teams representing North America (NA) and the Rest of the World (RoW). The first two days consist of 6 matches each played using the Pinehurst modified foursomes system, with the final day comprising 12 singles matches. With the first Vision Cup (held in the USA in 2013) resulting in a narrow win for the RoW side and the second event (held in Italy in 2015) producing a comfortable RoW win, this year's strong NA side was certainly hoping for a turnaround in fortunes.



Garrett Slattery (right) and guide Erich Kliem (left) on day 1

The Course & Community

The Creston Golf Club is situated in the spectacular Creston Valley in British Columbia. The course is carved into the rolling hills, is well wooded and features really challenging undulating greens. The course was in excellent condition despite the recent lack of rain which left some hard and dry patches in the rough. While wayward shots were generally punished, good scores could be made by keeping the ball in the right position.

What was truly fantastic at this year's Vision Cup was the extent to which the local Creston community got involved. There were dozens of locals involved as volunteers for everything from catering, ball spotting, marking, transportation, etc. Nothing was too much trouble for someone to sort out. This produced a very welcoming feel to the event.

The Teams

The hosting NA team, captained by Creston local Darren Douma assisted by vice-captains Jeremy Poincenot and George Thirkill comprised:

Chad NeSmith (B1), USA	Darcy Furber (B2), Canada
Gerry Nelson (B1), Canada	Harry Hester (B2), USA
Mario Tobia (B1), USA	Tom Marks (B3), USA
Joe Furber (B1), Canada	Linda Port (B3), USA
Derek Kibblewhite (B2), Canada	Darren Douma (B3), Canada
Jeremy Poincenot (B2), USA	Doug Penner (B3), Canada

The RoW team (some of whom travelled from as far as 16,500 km to get to Creston), captained by SABGA member Garrett Slattery assisted by vice-captain John Eakin comprised:

Andrea Calcaterra (B1), Italy	Garrett Slattery (B2), South Africa
Zohar Sharon (B1), Israel	Steve Mitchell (B2), Australia
Dong-Sig Im (B1), South Korea	John Eakin (B3), England
Jeong-II Yoo (B1), South Korea	Pete Osborne (B3), England
In-Chan Cho (B2), South Korea	Cameron McDiarmid (B3), Scotland
Andy Gilford (B2), England	Ally Reid (B3), Scotland

The teams were probably as balanced as could have been possible, each having 4 rookies to the event, 3 or 4 players who have played in both of the two previous events, and very similar total handicaps. On paper at least, this was set up to be an extremely tight affair.

Players were assisted every step of the way by their guides, who form an integral part of blind golf. While not part of the guiding contingent this time round it was also great to see Kevin Lemmon and Dave (Smurf) Emberly travelling down to lend a hand where they could.

The Results

The first day's Pinehurst pairs left nothing to choose between the sides. RoW wins for McDiarmid & Sharon, Slattery & Calcaterra and Osborne & Mitchell, along with a halved match from Eakin & Cho against Kibblewhite & Penner gave the RoW side 3.5 points. NA wins from Nelson & Tobia and Poincenot & Hester meant that only one point separated the sides after the first day.

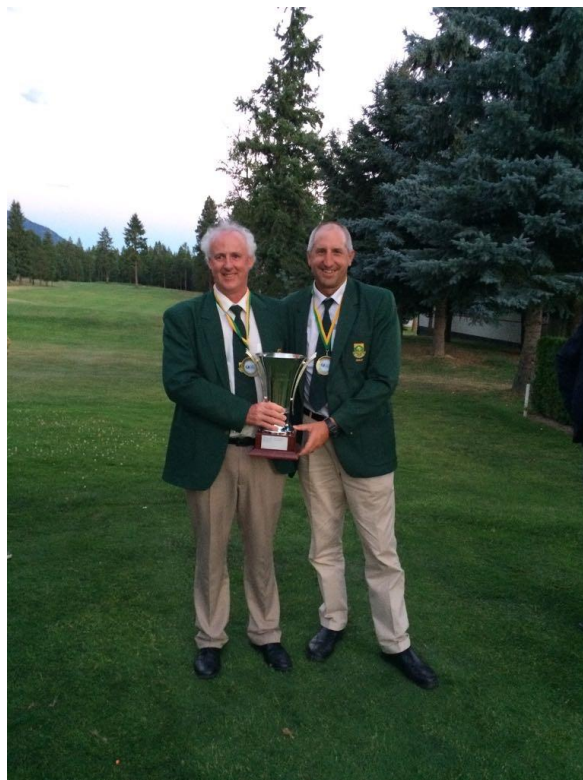
The second day was equally as tight. NA wins from Marks & Tobia, Furber, D & NeSmith, and Port & Hester along with a halved match from Douma & Poincenot against Eakin & Cho, gave the NA team 3.5 points. RoW wins for Reid & Gilford and McDiarmid & Sharon meant that the match was tied at 6 points each going into the final day.

The final day, as might have been expected from the first two days, was tight all the way with neither side every being more than one point ahead. From the first 10 matches completed NA wins for Tobia, Kibblewhite, Poincenot, Hester & Port and a halved match for Douma against McDiarmid left the NA team on 11.5 points and on the brink of their first win. RoW wins for Sharon, Slattery, Eakin and Osborne left the RoW team on 10.5 points and only 1 behind.

When Calcaterra won his match on the 18th hole against NeSmith the teams were tied on 11.5 points each with everything resting on match 24 between Canadian Joe Furber and South Korean Jeong-II Yoo, which was all square with 4 holes to play. Yoo won the 15th hole, but a 3-put on the 16th saw Furber tie things up again with only two holes left. At this stage the pressure must have been immense on these two players who were being followed by a swarm of golf buggies, players and other spectators.

A well-played 17th hole by Furber saw him win this crucial hole meaning that the NA team was guaranteed at least a half point from the match and hence at least 12 (of the 24) points on offer. If Yoo did not manage to win the par 5 18th the NA side would win their first Vision Cup. Furber found himself in some trouble off the tee on the last hole while Yoo pushed his drive to the right. A good recovery from Yoo gave him the advantage coming up the fairway which he retained as the players made their way up to the green. Despite a good shot onto the green by Furber, he had to concede the hole to Yoo resulting in a halved match, and both sides finishing on totals of 12 points.

So after three days of tough play the Vision Cup was halved, and the RoW team retained the trophy.



Garrett & Erich with the ISPS Handa Vision Cup

There is no doubt that all participants went away feeling some sense of satisfaction. The determination shown by all of the players was truly inspiring. Matches such as this will also undoubtedly fuel the spirit of this great event, and whet the appetite for the next edition in two years' time.

Further Thanks

As usual, none of this would have been possible were it not for the fantastic team of guides who assisted the golfers every step of the way. Garrett was particularly grateful that Stellenbosch Golf Club's teaching professional, Erich Kliem, was able to guide for him for the third time outside of South Africa. The pair, who know each other well from the Stellenbosch Golf Club, again gelled well together.

Thanks must also go to the IBGA which, through generous funding from Dr. Handa, was able to provide valuable financial support for the event. As is regularly the case at the large IBGA events it was great to have John White present all the way from Perth, Australia, as Dr. Handa's representative. John's enthusiasm and encouragement to the players was highly appreciated. The sponsorship from numerous local individuals and enterprises in the Creston community were also of great value, and essential for the success of the event.

Garrett and Erich would also like to sincerely thank the Boland Golf Union as well as the Stellenbosch Golf Club and the members, who provided valuable support and encouragement to the pair.