

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*In the picture, Banyan Golf Club, Hua Hin scooped the Oscar's of golf in the following categories Best Course in Thailand, 2nd Runner Up. Best Club General Manager of the Year: TOP 3 in ASIA, Stacey Walton. Best Director of Operations of the Year: Stuart Daly, Best Golf Course Superintendent of the Year, Khun Minachai, and Best Caddie of the Year : Khun Ked.*

## BANYAN GOLF CLUB TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ASIA PACIFIC GOLF SUMMIT 2014 IN SINGAPORE

By Stacey Walton, General Manager, Banyan Golf Club, Hua Hin, Thailand.

The opening theme of the regions annual golf conference in Singapore was to reflect on the current situation of the golf industry and what it will look like in the future. As a Sport and Business, golf operates on a huge scale. Although, there are no official figures, an estimated 80 million golfers play on close to 40,000 courses in the World. Golf events are said to be worth around \$2billion a year, and golf tourism somewhat around \$1billion. Source. HSBC Vision 2020 report.

The game is continuing to grow in popularity in Asia, broadening its international base, building new markets, new audiences and recruiting new players, but golf needs to keep modernizing itself to stay in touch with the times. For some in the game, this will be a challenge. But, the only thing worse than change is irrelevance.

Many of the private golf courses throughout Asia still have got the doors closed on children and the general public with an ageing membership base. Also, there are more women playing the game - a trend that will continue to grow in the future. We only have to look at the LPGA and see the number of female golf professionals coming from China, Korea, Japan and Thailand as an indicator of what is in store for the future.

Golf is booming in Asia, the future superstars are here already Yani Tseng is following the footsteps of Annika Sorenstam. Shanshan Feng won the LPGA Championship at 22 years old to be the first Chinese player to win a major. Andy Zhang played in the US Open at a tender age of just 14-years old. Guan Tianlang was also just 14-years old to be the youngest ever player at the Masters. With the Olympics dawning a new era for golf in 2016 another Tiger Woods "superstar" may just well rise from this side of the globe.

Club management has a responsibility to keep the game alive with new directions. Energy and drive to grow the game and to take golf to new heights in Asia. Key note speakers throughout the two days of the conference concluded that it's not about change, it's about creating the future.

The panel session attended by Stacey Walton GM of Banyan, Patrick Bowers MD of Laguna, Bruce Williams and Terrance Anton from Snag Golf addressed the future trends of golf and the very issues pressing on the future growth of the game, especially in cities where urbanization forces increased demands on peoples time so that for many an 18 hole round that takes just over 4 hours is no longer suitable for the majority. So there is a call for shorter courses and more interesting formats of golf to cater for families with more mixed events, adult and children competitions.

The panel also discussed how fashion plays an important part and how women's collection should improve in golf shops and perhaps, the possibility of stocking a children's' range. If this is the case then clubhouse architects need to realize that a golf club needs to accommodate for women and children with facilities and services that are relevant such as a coffee shop outlet, supervised children's play centers. Nutritional menus in the restaurants with healthier varieties, relaxation rooms with massage and fitness facilities with personal instructors. To be a more profitable golf club, management needs to meet the needs of women on and off the course.

Technology is influencing the behavior of the younger generation. Generation Z are already ipad users under the age of 5. So, where will golf fit to be more relevant for this generation especially in cities. Golf simulators, pocket caddies, golf games with motion sensors, mobile applications and online booking systems should invite people into golf and not the other way round. Driving ranges will become as exciting as going ten pin bowling at a cinema complex.

Fundamentally, the future of golf is through our children. Junior development programs such as the HSBC grass Roots, First Tee, SNAG, golf academies and club managers should get a grip on providing juniors with the opportunity to play and learn.

On an end note, golf courses need to be affordable, accessible with a sustainable and profitable business model as well as being environmental as the world's water reserves are increasingly becoming a major issue in many parts of the world. The new green, is brown and we have already experienced this at the last Open Championships and finally, the golf ball should be regulated at a professional level as it's just going further and further making new courses longer and less sustainable.

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