



Richard Saunders on the first tee

THE INAUGURAL EVENT TO BE HOSTED AT OLD THORNS

The Open will be coming to Hampshire in August, however you will not be seeing Tiger Woods, Padraig Harrington, Ross Fisher or Rory McIlroy, but you will be seeing skills on display that will rank with any in the game. For the first Disabled British Open is being held at the beautiful Old Thorns golf course on the 24th and 25th August.

At a press gathering to promote the forthcoming event, held at the club, speakers from several of the organisations involved or supporting the new event outlined both the enthusiasm for the competition and also their involvement, and gave a potted history of the organisations they represent.



Andy Robinson and Richard Saunders

The opening speaker was Esther Appleyard, the joint programme Director from Accentuate, who highlighted the importance of such a new event, and it's potential impact to attract handicapped and disabled golfers to the game. It was refreshing to hear all the speakers speak openly about their disabilities, and their total lack of concern for terminology, but welcomed the participation and involvement of all.

It is to be the largest and most inclusive golf competition in the country for disabled golfers, and it is anticipated that it will attract golfers from all over the country for this pan disabled event. An Accentuate Project, supported by the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA), it will

include golfers who are blind, amputees, special needs and wheelchair bound. TV coverage will be provided by Sky Sports as part of the golf programming.

Special Olympics Great Britain founded in 1978, is one of the three official Olympic family members, and it is honoured to be invited to participate, the organisation is unique in that it is the only Olympic structure that features golf as an event.

Richard Saunders of the British Amputee and Les Autres Sports Association, spoke of the high standards achieved by some of their members, and of the support received from the R&A and the EGU.

Peter Hull MBE, the disability development officer explained how Sport Hampshire & IOW encouraged the inclusion of disabled people into main stream sport, guidance on training for coaches, and identified and creates paths into competitive sport for disabled people.

The oldest group is The Society of One Armed Golfers, which was established in 1932, originally to cater for golfers who had lost limbs in the First World War.

Since then it has evolved to include road accident victims, stroke victims, birth abnormalities and any person who only has

one arm. The Society was represented by Andy Robinson, who has been World Champion on seven occasions.

With many disabled military personnel returning with injuries from Iraq and Afghanistan, these organisations are a perfect vehicle to restore sports activity and rehabilitation for those wishing to participate.

Having witnessed the standards achieved by those present and playing the Old Thorns course, wonderful achievements are being made by all those involved.

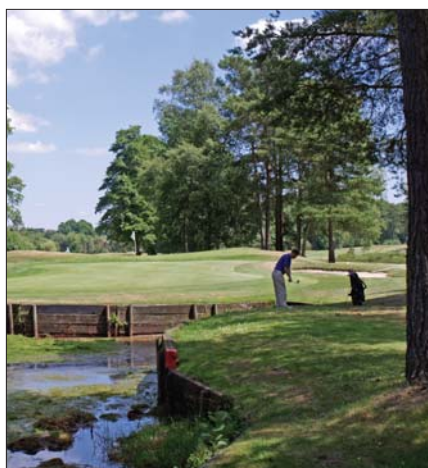
The invitation is there for all to come and see these highly accomplished golfers, cope with and overcome their disabilities to enjoy and perform well on the golf course.

Marshall and stewards are required for the two days. Admission is free for all spectators, and prizes will be awarded by the doyen of golf reporting, Peter Alliss.

All those who attended were welcomed by Ashley Butterfield of Old Thorns, and he concluded by reiterating the welcome for the 24th and 25th August. Go along and see, I guarantee a superb time and a rewarding experience to boot.



Michael Rees



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