



**Bridging the Gap:
A white paper on making the transition from
amateur to professional golf in Canada**

**Prepared by the Canadian Professional Golf Tour
April 19, 2010**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada is passionate about the game of golf. But the roster of players on the PGA TOUR often fails to reflect that passion back to Canadians.

This paper explores the reasons for the discrepancy, solicits expert perspectives and considers possible solutions as the world prepares for golf to return to the Summer Olympics in Rio in 2016.

It is focused in particular on the necessary roles of the Canadian Tour, the Royal Canadian Golf Association (RCGA) and the Canadian Professional Golfers' Association (CPGA).

The Canadian Tour has evolved into a high-calibre training ground for professionals on their way to the PGA TOUR, with alumni that include not only the game's Canadian legends, but also many of its most prominent international names.

The Royal Canadian Golf Association is the governing body of golf in Canada, promoting participation, passion and excellence in golf while seeking to guard its traditions, preserve its integrity and shape its future.

The member-based Canadian Professional Golfers' Association, with more than 3,500 members across the country, fosters excellence in the game's professional ranks.

This paper is also focused on issues related to Canadian male touring professionals. The status of the women's professional golf in Canada merits similar discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Bridging the gap

It's one of those pieces of golf lore that Canadians who play the game can proudly recite by heart: on a per-capita basis, their country is home to more golfers than anywhere else in the world.

Few from beyond Canada's borders, however, would believe it.

That's because the international golf community tends to view the PGA TOUR as a barometer of a nation's success on the golf course. Since George Knudson won eight PGA TOUR events between 1961 and 1972, only a smattering of Canadians have made a dent in the consciousness of the golf world: Richard Zokol (one tour win), Dave Barr (two) and Dan Halldorson (one official and one unofficial win) in the 80s and 90s, and Mike Weir (eight) and Stephen Ames (four) since.

In relative terms, at least, Canada barely registers. Why does a country as golf-mad as Canada see so little of itself on the game's greatest stages?

The answer may lie in "the gap" between when a young Canadian player turns professional and when he first reaches the PGA TOUR. The gap—five years, typically—is an impossible period to bridge for many players.

The overwhelming majority of competitive Canadian players who head to the professional ranks with great promise after successful junior and amateur careers at the world level never achieve success on the world's major tours.

"We ask ourselves all the time where the next Mike Weir or George Knudson is coming from, when in fact the question may well be how many players have fallen through the cracks for lack of funding," says Canadian Tour commissioner Rick Janes. "Players will run out of money long before they run out of talent."

Jon Mills, one of a new generation of Canadian hopefuls with the country's hopes on their supple shoulders, says new touring pros invariably struggle to cope with the sudden, real-life pressure of needing to make a cheque.

"Their focus tends to be, 'OK, now I'm playing for money,' and they think about how much they're going to make, and they put pressure on themselves," says Mills, 32, a former Canadian Tour Order of Merit winner who twice lost his PGA TOUR card after tough seasons (2006 and 2008) and currently plays on the Nationwide Tour.

“That really hurts a player's development and career as a professional. I've seen so many people quit because of that.”

Shrinking that gap calls for a coordinated and collaborative effort between the RCGA, the Canadian PGA and the Canadian Tour, Janes says.

“Athlete development is not something that can be addressed in isolation,” he says.

“Each of these organizations—the Canadian Tour, RCGA and CPGA—plays a distinctive role in the process, which should be a seamless transition for our elite amateur players into the world of professional golf,” Janes says.

“As it stands today, Canadians are being held back compared to developing golf nations like China and Korea where sports authorities are demanding more opportunities for their athletes.

“We can lobby much more effectively to advance the interests of Canadian players if we work together as a nation on the world stage.”

THE CHALLENGES

An uphill battle

Of all the challenges faced by the modern would-be professional athlete, few are as daunting as those that confront the countless men and women around the world who set out each year to play golf for a living.

Unlike athletes who play team sports, professional golfers are independent contractors who are wholly dependent on their skills in a fickle, challenging game that's cruel at the best of times and downright sadistic at its worst.

Not even the vast majority of Canada's top-notch amateurs and elite junior players can ever expect to make it to the PGA TOUR, experts say.

About 85 per cent of these young players leave competitive golf before adulthood, says Dr. Steve Norris of the Canadian Sports Centre in Calgary, Alta., who helped create the CPGA's and RCGA's joint Long Term Player Development (LTPD) guide for Canadian recreational and competitive golfers.

In any professional athletic endeavour, the road to success is a long and difficult one. Golf is no different.

Florida State University psychologist Dr. Anders Ericsson found it takes at least 10 years of intense training and practice, about four to five hours a day, to become a world-class expert in any discipline. And even that's no guarantee.

"Most physicists will not become Einstein," Dr. Robert J. Sternberg of Yale University wrote in a 1996 paper, *The Costs of Expertise*. "Most composers will wonder why they can never become Mozart."

Long Odds

The odds have always seemed stacked against Canada.

A Canadian male junior competitive golfer trying to make it to the PGA TOUR has a chance of about one in 10,200, according to research by RCGA National Men's Team coach Henry Brunton.

A collegiate player at the NCAA Division I, II, III, NAIA and NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association) level, on the other hand, faces odds of about 386 to one; 100 to one at the Division I level alone.

Among Brunton's other findings:

- The odds of a Canadian Amateur champion getting on the PGA TOUR, such as Richard Zokol (1981), Jim Nelford (1975, 1976) and Garrett Willis (1995), are six to one.
- A Canadian Junior champion like Jim Rutledge and George Knudson would have a one-in-26 chance.

I made it ... now what?

In pro golf, getting there is the easy part.

Once you've qualified, now you have to play well enough to earn enough to sustain yourself on tour. That is, you must win enough to pay for expenses such as entry fees, travel, caddie, food, accommodation and day-to-day living.

Worrying about dealing with maxed-out credit cards as well as a wonky putting stroke puts a lot of stress on players. Financial pressure is a reality for all working people, but it's especially difficult for many elite amateur golfers who turn professional. Overnight, they go from playing on financially supported provincial and national teams to fending for themselves. Learning how to handle oneself as a touring player can be lonely and presents a major challenge just in learning to deal with life on the road.

Some players get business mentoring from friends or family, as well as financial support through consortiums and corporate sponsors. But when a player struggles in those first few years, sponsorship and other sources of financial support can dry up.

The combination of concerns over finances and earning enough prize money can drive some players out of their chosen profession early in their career. The tragedy is that with more support, they could handle the stresses better, learn how to handle themselves as professionals and prove whether they have the stuff of champions over a longer period of time.

David Hearn, who won on both the Canadian and Nationwide tours in 2004 and graduated to the PGA TOUR in 2005, lost his card that same year and has been toiling on the Nationwide Tour ever since.

“Golf is a never-ending performance evaluator,” says Hearn, from Brantford, Ont. “It’s an ongoing process. It’s not like all of a sudden, you’ve reached it, and you’re done.”

Canadian Tour all-time money leader Mike Grob of Billings, Mont., qualified for the PGA TOUR in 2003 at the age of 38, finished 149th on the money list and earned just under \$349,000. All that got him was a trip back to third stage of Q-School and conditional status for 2004.

“You think that the toughest part might be Q-School,” Grob says. “But you still have to play really, really well just to keep your card.”

Mills says that it’s critical to find ways to ease real-life pressures—such as concerns about money—for players trying to making to the PGA TOUR, and stay there.

“I didn’t play well my first year, but I had good funding, good backers, to where I didn’t have to worry about money early on; I could just go out and play,” Mill says.

Sponsorships, be they equipment deals or financing help with private supporters, can make all the difference. “For a guy who maybe hasn’t had that kind of a college career or anything like that, it’s going to be extra tough,” Mills adds.

ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

The Royal Canadian Golf Association

In 2005, the RCGA set out to explain why a country with the world’s highest rates of per-capita participation in golf had so few elite players to show for it. It also focused on how to fix the problem.



“For years now, this country has wanted to have more heroes,” says Scott Simmons, the RCGA’s executive director and CEO.

He says that the federal government is looking to the RCGA to drive participation, increase the number of players and foster excellence in golf—and it will need the help of the CPGA and the Canadian Tour to do it.

Since 2005, the RCGA has been examining best practices in other countries as part of its research in coming up with a new development strategy for Canada. This led to the creation of the “Team Canada” blueprint.

The Team Canada concept attempts to foster increased excellence in Canadian golf that will better reflect Canada’s grassroots passion for the game. The objective of the program is to be one of the top three nations developing amateur golfers.

The RCGA’s website says, “The Team Canada program is focused at further developing the best golfers in Canada to be competitive on the international stage... The RCGA has designed full-time programs for both the Amateur Team and the Development Team to support the vision of creating the strongest players and program in the world.”

The program consists of full-time coaches such as Henry Brunton, as well as training camps, a full competition schedule and support from consultants in mental management, exercise physiology, nutrition, biomechanics, physiotherapy and sports medicine.

Simmons says: “Now, we need to get the horse to the water. We think we have the recipe, and now we need the industry to support it.”

Jeff Thompson, the RCGA’s chief sport development officer, says a new focus on Canada’s coaching system, with a particular emphasis on preparing for the PGA TOUR’s Q-School, will help to widen one of the narrowest bottlenecks in the pipeline. He insists that good coaches can have an exponential effect on growth.

“Successful athletes in any sport will tell you that they were surrounded by the right people,” Thompson says. “If you develop, say, 20 coaches to the best of their ability, they are all going to touch 100 players each.”

Gary Bernard, executive director of the Canadian PGA, says his organization is working in concert with the RCGA as part of the LTPD to develop coaches within its membership who will work with young professionals in the gap.

The vision



“Wouldn’t it be great,” asks Simmons, “if we had the financial resources as an industry to take all of our young men and women who are trying to make a career out of professional golf, and be able to give them free, unencumbered access to facilities, coaching and mentoring?”

It’s a Utopian vision, to be sure, but not beyond the realm of possibility, provided the right strategy is in place and the dollars are there to support it.

The RCGA is working on a new membership strategy that looks to shed its traditional image among Canadian golfers and clubs as a handicapping agency. Instead, the RCGA wants to portray itself as the leader in developing players in Canada.

Golfers who are members of the RCGA—either through their private club membership or by joining the RCGA’s Public Player Program through their provincial association—can earmark their dues to support the game in various forms. This includes Golf in Schools programs, junior development efforts, Canada’s national team or for young touring pros trying to establish their careers.

Funds can also be designated for “other things that need to be done to take the (Canadian) Tour to the next level,” Simmons says.

Canadian Graham DeLaet, who is enjoying his first year on the PGA TOUR, says: “We’ve got a lot of good guys on the Nationwide Tour and you’re going to see a lot more Canadians coming through the ranks because of the RCGA’s developmental program.”

The role of the Canadian Tour

DeLaet, of Weyburn, Sask., had a banner year in 2009 on the Canadian Tour, winning the tour’s ATB Financial Classic, The Players Cup, the Order of Merit and an event in South Africa.

A former member of the RCGA’s national team, DeLaet credits his three years on the rigorous Canadian Tour for helping him gain the experience and confidence to earn his 2009 PGA TOUR card at last fall’s Q school.

“I would not be here right now if not for the Canadian Tour,” DeLaet said at the news conference where he was named the 2009 ROLEX Player of the Year. “In my opinion, it is the best development tour in the world. It is a great tour.”

For Canadian born players such as DeLaet, progressing from the RCGA’s development program to the Canadian Tour means they can compete as professionals, earn money, and play against some of the best young international competition without leaving their own country.



The Canadian Tour has graduated more than 100 players to the PGA TOUR. Following in the footsteps of Dan Halldorson and Dave Barr, players such as Mike Weir, Stephen Ames and a host of international players such as Tim Clark, Chris DiMarco, Steve Stricker and Tim Herron all got their start on the Canadian Tour.

On average, the Canadian Tour graduates 12 players each year to the Nationwide Tour and two directly to the PGA TOUR.

“The Canadian Tour is by far the best tour that you can play on and learn what you need to learn to get to the next level,” says Tom Stankowski, winner of the 2008 Canadian Tour Championship.

Nothing teaches like the experience of facing a deep field, say those who bear the scars from the school of hard knocks. They’re unanimous: Getting more Canadians on the PGA TOUR depends on a healthy and vibrant Canadian Tour.

“They have to learn to suffer a bit, hunker down and do it,” says Halldorson, a member of the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame. “You would take a beating, get up, shake yourself off and keep going.”

Nothing is more critical to a golfer’s success than hard work, Halldorson added. “You can’t make a career out of mediocre golf.”

The Economic Reality

A healthy, self-sustaining Canadian Tour depends a lot on the corporate sector to support professional golf. But that hasn’t been easy: Prominent, long-time sponsors have been forced to re-evaluate their priorities as they struggle with a new economic reality.

“Corporate Canada has to get involved more with the Canadian Tour, and it doesn’t necessarily have to be in a big way,” says Barr, also a member of the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame. “It seems like everyone sits back and waits for someone else to do something, but then they wonder where all the Canadians are.”

There’s a role for the players, too, for whom the ability to raise funds is a critical survival skill, says Mills. He says that if players interacted more with the corporate community, it would help create awareness of the tour and Canadian development, and foster relationships that could help more players to make their living as touring professionals.

“If you get the players to interact with the RCGA sponsors, the ones they use for tournaments and stuff like that, maybe that’s a starting point to help them get to the

point where players can go out the first couple of years as a pro and not have to worry about making a pay cheque each week,” Mills says.

“If players can go out there and just play golf, instead of focusing on these other things that hinder your play, it would definitely be a good starting point.”

The CPGA’s Bernard says: “We can’t throw money at trying to help these young players. And we can’t expect corporations just to give money to them. There has to be a business case for it so there is a return on their investment.

“Young pros need to understand that they are in business, and that they need to develop their own business model. This would mean that young pros can demonstrate that they understand their business when they present themselves to corporations. As an organization, we can help them in that capacity.”

Changing public perception

The Canadian Tour is among the country’s best-kept secrets. Most Canadian golf fans do not know that the level of golf on the Tour is nearly indistinguishable from the Nationwide Tour which feeds the PGA TOUR.

The RCGA’s Simmons says: “There are unbelievable players on the Canadian Tour, and as a nation we have to find a way to support them both from a community and corporate perspective.”

That’s where the average Canadian golf fan comes in, says Ken Trowbridge, who played on the Canadian Tour and other worldwide tours during his 35-year career in the golf industry.

He says that Canadians wouldn’t hesitate to support the Canadian Tour if they better understood the correlation between their support and an increasing the number of their countrymen and women in the top ranks of the world’s tours.

“We need to institute a program that is funded by the avid Canadian golfer, because they are the ones that ask the questions about why we don’t have more PGA TOUR players,” Trowbridge says.

Canadian Tour Commissioner Rick Janes believes that joint action between the tour, RCGA and Canadian PGA can broaden the appeal of the tour by better engaging fans of golf, but also by touching their Maple Leaf hearts.



One scenario is to create a “Team Canada” comprised of homegrown tour players that would compete on the Tour, “generating interest and enthusiasm among Canadian golf fans while they test their mettle against some of the best young players in the world,” Janes says.

The criteria are still undetermined, but Janes says the team would be selected by the Canadian Tour, RCGA and CPGA. It’s likely that players considered would be those with five years or less experience as touring professionals—thus, players in the gap.

Members of Team Canada would be identifiable by their apparel and hats, logos on their bags, joint sponsorship by one or more corporate partners, and marketing and communications support (e.g. highlighting the progress, scores and stories of team members as they traverse the country on the tour).

“To a degree, this would be as much about promoting Canada's up-and-coming players as providing the support they need to develop as young professionals,” Janes says.

“This is one idea that we are exploring to better market and support our top young professionals in Canada. We are very fortunate to have a domestic platform in the form of the Canadian Tour which showcases our best young players. But I think we take it for granted. The Canadian Tour is as vital to the health of the game in this country as the Brier is to curling or the Grey Cup is to football.”

Former South African Sunshine Tour Commissioner Johan Immelman, a Canadian Tour independent director whose son Trevor won the 2008 Masters, is adamant that Canadian golf needs a more prominent profile at events both at home and abroad.

“The more the Canadian flag is at the top of the leaderboard at Canadian Tour events and elsewhere, the more people and companies will want to get involved with the Canadian Tour.”

(Only five Canadians have ever won their own tour’s Order of Merit: Dave Barr, Jerry Anderson, Mike Weir, Jon Mills and Graham DeLaet.)

The key, says Immelman, is more events. More events beget more sponsorship, which equals more attractive purses, deeper fields and—eventually—more Canadian players.

The Canadian Tour also brings high-calibre golf to communities that might not otherwise get to see it. Not only can a Canadian Tour event generate a local economic impact of more than \$1.2 million per week, but also it can jump-start grassroots participation, buttressing the ranks of Canada’s future champions.

Stuart Anderson is a prime example. When he was a boy, Anderson, a two-time winner on the Canadian Tour and a member of Canada's World Cup Team in 2005 and 2009, saw Halldorson play a Canadian Tour event in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

"I knew then," Anderson recalled, "that I wanted to become a golfer."

A hand-up, not a handout

That's the new approach for the RCGA, which in the past has been accused of taking something of a "sink or swim" approach to developing Canada's young professionals.

Henry Brunton says the RCGA assists its national team players in planning and preparing for turning professional, helps them find an agent, counsels them on formulating business plans and getting ready for Q-School, among other things.

To help aspiring young professionals—Canadian or international—in their development, the Canadian Tour launched the Canadian Bursary Fund in 2006. The performance-based fund has paid out a total of \$135,000 in financial rewards for top performers in Canadian Tour events to help fund participation in the annual PGA TOUR Qualifying School.

Founded by Janes and Edmonton businessman Marv Holland, the fund was designed to recognize the consistent performance of players on the tour based on top-10 finishes using a point system.

"The Canadian Bursary is the porthole through which we can help develop our up-and-coming players, not only with financial support to compete internationally but also through the provision of support services like coaching, mentoring and the sport sciences," says Janes. "These are fundamentally the same services they receive as elite amateurs that fall by the wayside when they turn professional. They are the same services provided to all of our elite and Olympic bound athletes in Canada from hockey and alpine skiing to athletics. Why not golf?"

It's an example of just how important private support can be.

Angel Cabrera recently gave a generous donation to help young Argentines who are starting their professional golf careers, while the Swedish Golf Federation has petitioned its touring pros for similar support.

In many countries, it's not uncommon for emerging young superstars to tip it up alongside their childhood idols in an effort at mentorship, says Hearn. But he doesn't see that mentoring happening much among Canadian players.

“A lot of our Canadian pros in the generations prior to ours don't play a lot with a lot of the good, upcoming young Canadian players,” Hearn says. “Just the experience of doing that and being around that environment can only benefit a young player.”

“We need to cultivate the kind of mentoring that has helped in the development of players in South Africa, for example,” states Janes. “Players like Halldorson, Barr, Zokol and Nelford who have been there at the highest levels should be part of the ‘gap’ formula. However, we can’t expect them to do it for free.”

Ultimately, there is no instant remedy, warns Sean Foley, a leading Canadian coach whose stable of PGA TOUR players includes Stephen Ames, Justin Rose, Sean O’Hair, Hunter Mahan, and the LPGA Tour’s Lorie Kane. In some cases, it simply boils down to Ben Hogan’s famous advice about digging it out of the dirt.

“It is important that players make the necessary sacrifices,” says Foley. “You have to bear down and do it—there is no other way.”

2016 Olympics presents massive opportunity

For more Canadian golfers to compete at the highest levels of the game, the country needs more elite players—and soon. The rest of the world—Asia, Eastern Europe and South America in particular—is just as anxious to be competitive in golf by 2016 when golf returns to the Olympics in Rio.

“Golf in the Olympics has given countries the world over permission to pump money into golf,” says Janes, a member of the Olympic Golf Committee.

The Top 15 players in the Official World Golf Rankings will automatically qualify for the Olympics, regardless of nationality, along with the top two players from each country, up to a maximum of 60 players from around the world rankings. The challenge for Canadian golf will be to have four Canadians (two men and two women) qualify for the Olympics, which has enormous potential to foster growth in the game in countries that participate and contend.

It’s also important to note that the standing of Canada’s players in the Official World Golf Rankings will determine whether our golfers get to the Olympics.

Due to its well-established structure, history, reputation as a solid development tour, the Canadian Tour is in a position to help young Canadian players to make that transition through the gap to enjoy successful careers as touring professionals on the world’s leading tours.

Concerted and parallel action is called for among key Canadian stakeholders so that the tour can help these young Canadians.

For example, the accumulation of world ranking points is a pathway into top events around the world, which would in turn expose Canada’s young touring professionals to

the highest level of competition. However, a shortage of points for Canadian Tour events is keeping Canadians from the international stage, while other countries that are aggressively growing their golf programs—China is a shining example—are demanding more opportunities for their athletes.

Janes says that by pooling their resources, the Canadian Tour, CPGA and RCGA—with help from top Canadian players like Mike Weir—they could lobby effectively to ensure more world ranking points are available to the Canadian Tour.

CONCLUSIONS

It is the view of the Canadian Tour that the tour, RCGA and Canadian PGA must jointly develop a program that includes ongoing mentoring, coaching and financial support aimed at maximizing the potential of young professionals.

Who is eligible for that support, how long they participate in a program and how it is funded are among the issues to be worked out. The Canadian Bursary and the RCGA's new Team Canada initiative are the most obvious channels.

With golf poised to return to the Olympics, and the tremendous potential for inspiring Canadian recreational and competitive golfers, the time to take concrete action is upon us. Creating opportunities for our best players to maximize their potential to accumulate points and move up in the Official World Golf Rankings will be fundamental to how well Canada is represented at the games for years to come.

It is time that corporate Canada and the major stakeholders in Canadian golf come together to provide support and resources so that more young Canadian touring professionals can keep working toward fulfilling their dreams and inspiring generations of golfers to come. Too many of our players are giving up on those dreams.

Janes, Bernard and Simmons say they are willing to work together to help young professionals. Now the challenge is to turn intention into action that helps more Canadian players enjoy success rather than fall through the cracks.

Reporting by: John Berkovich

Prepared by: O'Connor Golf Communications www.oconnorgolf.ca

The Canadian Professional Golf Tour
1333 Dorval Dr. Suite 301
Oakville, ON
L6M 4X7

Tel: 905-815-9756 or 1-877-CANTOUR (226-8687)

Fax: 905-815-8523 or 1-877-888-2381

www.cantour.com

