

# WEE COUNTY = BIG SUCCESS

by Hugh Hunter

Clackmannan County Golf Union started life as the United Counties Golfing Association in 1903 - a combination of Clackmannan and Kinross shire Golf Clubs, possibly united by the Devon Valley railway. They organised a County Championship that year first held at Alva for the present silver Vardon statuette purchased for £25. A short time later, Kinross linked with Perthshire and the 5 local clubs went it alone. In the mid thirties, 5 became 6 when Alloa Golf Club moved to Schawpark and Braehead moved to a new 9 hole layout, extended to 18 holes in the early seventies over the original Arnsbrae Golf Course.

The first well documented success for a County Golfer came in September 1927 when Graeme Wright captured the prestigious 36 hole Silver Tassie title at Gleneagles from the golfing toffs. His achievement was well reported in the National Press " Mr John G Wright an Alva painter splashed his way into golfing fame at Gleneagles when he placed himself at the head of a field of 124 competitors for that desirable amateur trophy with rounds of 75 on the Kings and 71 on the Queens accomplished in heavy rain.

With the second world war intervening, golf was still keenly contested at local level, but National success was slow to build up, and the break through came at the Scottish Boys in 1969 with Robin Fyfe taking the title. The field actually contained 9 County boys in total - -- RPF Jimmy Laird (Alloa) C Thomson, R Lyon (Alva) David Riddell (Alloa) T Dobson (Dollar), Henry Anderson (Tulliallan) and Neil Bryson (Dollar). Laird and Bryson both reached the 5<sup>th</sup> round (last 16) before losing but it was Fyfe with a solid victory over Ian Doig by 4 and 2 who became the first Clackmannanshire winner of a national title.

At this point, I would pay tribute to the excellent writings of local Bob Hall in the Alloa Advertiser. Undoubtedly these inspired writings played a large part in the motivation and development of many County golfers.

Sandy Horne (Tulliallan) became the first County player to achieve his International cap in 1971, helping Scotland to a Home International victory.

Moving forward to 1973, and it was Bobby Watson (Dollar) taking the same title, with the press recording " It says much for the standard of golf in the smallest County in Scotland that 2 champions have been produced in 5 years. " There were 6 County entrants, Alan Hansen (Alloa), Jim Christine, (Tulliallan) John Hay, Bobby Watson, Ian Devine and Russell Brown. Hay and Watson met in the semi-final (it could have been an all Clackmannan final) Watson won by one hole after being 4 up In the final Watson played Harry Alexander (Haggs Castle) Alexander's swing was blown to bits by the strong wind and it was Watson who struck the ball further and surer with increasing authority. Bobby was nine up after 27 holes winning by 8 and 7.

1975 saw Alva golfer Norman Wood play in the Ryder Cup, beating former Open Champion Lee Trevino. Other locals who made their mark on the professional scene were Frank Rennie, Jack Steven and Robin Liddle who won the Northern Open as an assistant professional in 1966.

1978 was the first team success at National level when the Clackmannanshire quartet of boys Alex Pickles, Grant McNab, Ross Binnie (all Alloa) and Keith McPhee (Braehead) won the Area Boys team title at Alloa Golf Club.

1981 and John Gullen was the pride of Tillicoultry and on the fairway to success. On the 15<sup>th</sup> July, he was crowned King John when he took the Scottish Boys Stroke Play title. After 4 rounds, he tied and in the play off he chipped to 6 ft and holed the birdie putt. With tremendous modesty, he was quoted “ I was just hoping to qualify for the last two rounds and finish as high as I could. I was not expecting to win it”

1982 saw Alex Pickles and Grant McNab gain Youths caps, John Gullen reach the quarter finals of the Eden tournament, and Alex Pickles finishing 8<sup>th</sup> in the British Youths. John helped the Scottish Boys golf team to a draw against England at Gullane.

Forward to 1987, and Alloa Golf Club became the first County Club to take the Scottish Club Championship at Cruden Bay when Alex Pickles, Alan Watson and Peter McLeod took the title and went forward to represent Scotland in Spain.

Another 9 years forward and its Steven Horne who achieves his Boys cap in 1996 at Littlestone, recording 3 wins, 2 losses and one half. One year later (and a considerable achievement) in 1997 he gained his Senior cap repeated in 1998, unfortunately England won the Home International title both years.

1999 was a significant year for County teams. The Tulliallan trio of Mark Crichton, Steven Horne and Ian Macaulay won the Scottish Club Championship by one shot over the Kilmarnock Barassie course, and the Clackmannan team qualified for the Area Team Championship finals at Peebles losing to Lothians in the semi-finals.

2002 saw Scott Borrowman become the first Clackmannan County winner of the Scottish Under 16 title at Ratho Park with a one shot victory, leaving only the Under 14 title to be captured at Boys level by a Clackmannan player. Tulliallan Golf Club (represented by Mark Crichton, Neil Scaife and Alistair Ferguson) lifted the Club title again at home by one shot and undoubtedly due to a 5 under par score from Alistair Ferguson. Significantly, Mark Crichton has featured in both winning teams. Braehead's Ross Benvie took a bronze medal at the Scottish Boys Championship by reaching the semi-finals, losing to the eventual winner John Hempstock

2003 saw Scott gaining his Under 16 boys cap and the County team once again qualifying for the Area Team Championship finals, reaching the final but losing out to Lothians again, this time here at Schawpark.

2004 saw Michael Niven gaining a Senior cap after a fine 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish in the Scottish Seniors event. Michael has been a real stalwart on the County scene ever since his County Boys Championship wins in the late fifties. He has notched up a considerable amount of golf country wide since then with considerable success, from the Highland Open in Pitlochry to the semi-finals of the Dutch Amateur.

2005 saw Scott Borrowman finish 5<sup>th</sup> in the Junior Tour events and achieving his full boys cap at the Boys Home Internationals at Woodhall Spa, Scotland finishing in third place.. Grant Dowie from Alloa finished 6<sup>th</sup> equal in the Junior Masters at Gleneagles.

2007 was significant for Bob Stewart from Tulliallan who finished 16<sup>th</sup> in the inaugural Scottish Seniors Order of Merit and Gary Chalmers who finished in 8<sup>th</sup> position in the Under 14's Championship. 4 shots behind the winner.

But of course 2007 is the year of our two guests. Scott Borrowman became the first Clackmannan player to lift the Scottish Youths title, and becoming the first County player to win two National Golf titles At Erskine a nine under par score took the Championship by two shots, and he must be pleased that he led all the way with his nearest rivals not taking advantage of a wobbly spell on the inward nine. Scott had a good run in the Scottish

Amateur, reaching the quarter finals only to lose a bit disappointingly to local Allan Thompson. Further success came with a runner up spot in the Irish Youths, and a runner up spot (to Callum) in the Newlands Trophy, meaning a 1 – 2 for the Wee County. Further honour came with a selection for the Scottish Golf Union Team in the second Bunkered Match Play Challenge over the Carrick course.

But it is Callum Macaulay who has registered a top class season Back from America as a University graduate from the University of Mississippi, he immediately set about the home golfing scene using his American experience. Following his 2006 win in the West of Scotland Championship where he led all the way, he had five top ten finishes in the Order of Merit events, significantly winning the last two events (the South East Championship at West Linton and the Newlands Trophy at Lanark) to clinch his Order of Merit and Scottish Golf Ranking titles. He was pipped in the semi-finals of the Amateur at Royal Lytham, and reached the 5<sup>th</sup> round of the Scottish Amateur losing to the eventual winner John Gallagher. He recorded two course records in 2007, 63 at Lanark and 60 at Braehead with his putt for a 59 just escaping. Callum also recorded a fine round in the Regional Open Qualifying at Monktonhall, but could not repeat the magic in the final qualifying for Carnoustie at Barrie Golf Course. His performances led to a Scottish cap in the Home Internationals at County Louth in Ireland, and a team spot alongside Scott in the Bunkered Match Play Challenge.

At this point I have to say that I have watched both Scott and Callum at several of these events, and have to say that their performances are impressive, especially Callum He has demonstrated on many occasions that he has the game to reach the highest levels of golf. Twice in the Amateur he went to sudden death and prevailed with solid golf each time. The win against a Frenchman who was taking well over a minute to play each shot was particularly satisfying especially on the 20<sup>th</sup> hole. He had reached the last stage of preparation, and then a train came along causing him to start the long drawn out pre shot routine again.

I feel certain that we all look forward very much to following both Callum and Scott's progress in 2008. Callum is off to the Australian Amateur soon, and is also in the European team to play Asia at Valderrama in April.

its not just on the playing side where success has been achieved by County Golf Members. The county can record two Scottish Golf Union Presidents Jim Hamilton and Hugh Hunter, a winning rules of golf team from Braehead, Tillicoultry's Walter Woods reached the pinnacle of World Golf Course jobs, that of Links Superintendent at St Andrews via Braehead and Nottingham.

At this point it is appropriate to acknowledge the work of the Executive of the County Golf Union, in particular the work done by County Secretary Tommy Johnson .The original founders of the Union would be very proud of all these achievements.

As to the future for County golf things are looking bright. An initiative was started in 2007 and will continue in 2008 whereby a bus was provided for the Under 14's Championships in Ayrshire, and we are grateful to Willie Hatley for his support with the transport. Junior Sections are increasing, and so is the standard of golf. Alva Golf Club have been nominated for the Scottish Junior Golf Club of the year – they won the Clackmannanshire Sports Team of the year on top of the Junior League. Bob Stewart led the Spanish Seniors Open recently and surely must be motivated to try to achieve a Scottish Seniors Cap.

The golfers and golf supporters in the Wee County have a lot to be proud of, as I hope this presentation has shown. It is particularly pleasing to see all six Clubs making contributions. Long may that continue, and long may the passion for Wee County golf also continue.

. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank all the volunteer workers who help to make these successes possible, and encourage others to get involved. Thank you very much.

*Hugh Hunter 22.02.08*