



THE PGA OF FINLAND

The eleveth in our monthly series that takes a random look at member PGAs in turn.

# Pro Golf 'On Top of the World!'



Just like their colleagues from other Northern European countries, members of the PGA of Finland need to adapt their working year to a rather different timetable to those in the Central and the Southern climates.

Here we find that some courses can be snowed in and frostbound for several months a year while, in other months, the conditions are fabulous and the daylight hours are so long that the sun can be shining at midnight and, indeed, throughout the night.

Those PGA pros at courses with no visitors for lengthy spells of the winter can subsequently be required keep all facilities open for endless summer days when members can elect to tee off their friendly fourball at, say, 8 pm or later.

Not surprisingly then, Finland has always been known more for its winter sports, for Santa Claus & Lapland, for saunas indoors and outside, for the amazing Northern Lights and for

spectacular landscapes, than for its heroics on the fairways and greens.

**And yet...**

The story of golf expansion in this fascinating Scandinavian wonderland is impressive, indeed, ably assisted by an ambitious Golf Union and PGA which has already revealed the vision and capability to perfect the three-year training programme - introduced in 1989 - to PGAs of Europe recognition.

Facts and figures trace the story of a country that has embraced the sport just as enthusiastically as any. Back in the year 2000 there were some twenty or so 18-hole courses fed by 66,500 amateurs, many of whom were restricted mainly to using driving ranges.

Now fast forward eight years and there are 128 courses (some of them nine holes), a similar number of driving ranges and approximately 125,000 players...a figure that will inevitably keep rising as the opportunities to play, and be professionally taught, increase steadily.

Teemu Laakso, the young, active managing director of the PGA of Finland, reports a satisfying increase in membership from 131 in 2000, to 201 currently, plus five honorary members, and an honorary Chairman.

Teemu, who has been a tournament official at PGAse-endorsed tournaments, puts it simply: "We are working closely with the Finnish Golf Union and the Finnish Golf Tour and are also progressing the training programme.

"We want to improve on the way we educate our members and to co-operate with the other bodies to help Finnish players to establish themselves at the highest level."

Certainly, all those concerned are entitled to take a degree of pride from the fact that a comparatively fledgling PGA, founded in 1985 by teaching pros who were then members of the PGA of Sweden, now has 45 playing professionals, 113 teaching and 21 trainee members plus another 15 members who work in the golf business.

## PGA of Finland The Facts

Year Formed: **1985**  
 Executive Chairman: **Mika Walkamo**  
 Hon, Chairman: **Asko Arkkola**  
 Managing Director: **Teemu Laakso**  
 Head of Education: **Jouko Mikkola**

	2000	2008
Total members	131	201
Number of Amateur Players:	66,558	125,000
Number of Facilities (inc ranges)	70	135

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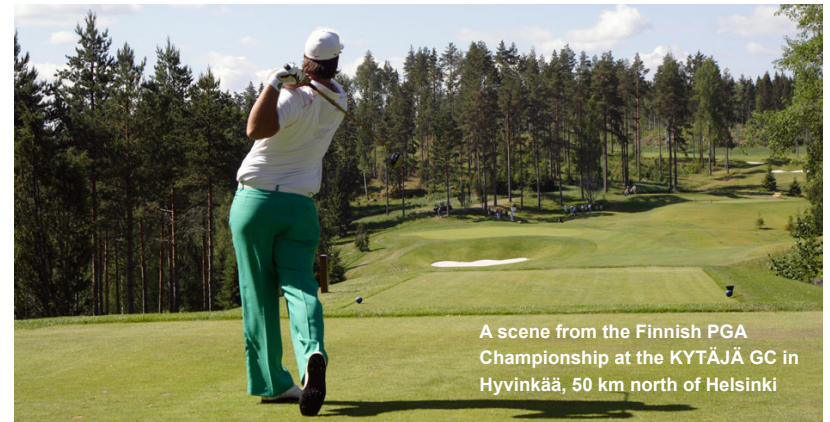


## Mikko & Minea, the Pioneering Finns

Although it's all a bit soon in their golf development to expect Finland to produce international stars they've actually done so in the development of Mikko Ilonen and Minea Blomqvist.

The tall and talented Ilonen first created a stir in European golf when he won the British Amateur Championship at Royal Liverpool in the year 2000. Back then who would have thought that a Finnish golfer could do such a thing! Later, on turning pro he quickly confirmed his ability, and established himself as a money winner by becoming the first Finn to put his name on a European Tour title, the Jakarta Astro Indian Open in 2007.

Then the same year, as if to show that he was not merely a shooting star who would disappear from sight, he added the Scandinavian Masters to his playing cv though, on the Ladies European Tour, **Minea Blomqvist** had beaten him to it by winning the OTP Bank Central European Open, Hungary, in 2004.



A scene from the Finnish PGA Championship at the KYTÄJÄ GC in Hyvinkää, 50 km north of Helsinki

## Did You Know?

- Typical summer temperature is in the 20s Celsius (70s Fahrenheit).
- Finland straddles the Arctic Circle so that in the north, the sun shines non-stop from June until August. In southern Finland the sun shines twenty-one hours a day, with a few hours of twilight in between.
- With nearly 200,000 lakes in Finland many of their courses find themselves with more than their fair share of water hazards.
- Long days mean that not everyone tees off at the same time. There are far fewer players per course than in some other golfing countries.
- There are dozens of 'Midnight' and 'Marathon' Tournaments each summer, either starting or ending at midnight. Some are played all night under the Midnight Sun. Marathon Golf Tournaments feature three or even four rounds of competitive golf in one day.
- The Green Zone Golf Course, in the neighbouring cities of Tornio, Finland, and Haparanda, Sweden, straddles two time zones and two countries. On the unique course by the British golf course designer Peter Chamberlain you can start a putt in one country and see it drop 'an hour later' on another country in a different time zones.
- Members of the PGA of Finland increasingly provide the professional back-up that make the remarkable package more popular every year.