



## PGA OF ICELAND

The third in a monthly series that takes a random look at each member country in turn.

# The Wind of Change Blowing Through Icelandic Golf

In the land where, for several weeks every year, the sun never sets, golf popularity is rising with an ever-growing number of players creating a welcome burst of job opportunities for PGA professionals.

With the dawn of this new era, **Arnar Már Ólafsson**, the new President, has returned to his homeland, from working in Germany, almost with a feeling of destiny.

His objective is to ensure that the PGA of Iceland is equipped, both numerically and in terms of educational expertise, to furnish the needs of the game's growing public. This, remember, in a region that we in central or southern Europe once thought of as merely a stopping-off place for Arctic Circle explorers.

As the sport shows every sign of flourishing, partially in tandem with the effects of global warming, and golf courses remaining green for longer each year than in the past, the local PGA is responding to the challenge by upgrading its education programme.



As revealed in last month's issue of Working Together, the number of amateur players grows by ten to twelve percent each year to around 30,000 and demand for lessons grows.

A training programme began at the Icelandic Sports Federation in 2006. There are ten students involved and they use the courses around Reykjavik for their practical purposes. Until this started, would-be golf pros had just two opportunities. Either, like Arnar, they went abroad to become PGA-qualified, or they remained there as unqualified professionals and headed nowhere in particular.

Arnar's task is to ensure that the icy wind that can blow across their golf courses becomes a wind of change, bringing a flow of indigenous PGA pros, eager to feed the public appetite.

To this end he and a former President, Hordur Arnason, have liaised carefully with Leif Óhlsson, the chairman of the PGAsE Education Committee, while Arnar also visited

the Belfry in April to seek further advice and information.

**As a result arrangements are now well advanced to set up a PGA of Iceland academy and happily the Icelandic Federation appreciates that only with a strong PGA can the sport prosper as it should and a programme is underway in the schools system that 'compares with those in Sweden and Germany'**

**In the Beginning:** The PGA of Iceland was founded in 1989. At that time Arnar was in Sweden, having left a year earlier to undertake the three-year training course.

In those early days a limited number of 'golf teachers' were emerging but they were not fully qualified. Early PGA pioneers were **David Barnwell** (Chairman/President), **Magnus Birgirson** (Treasurer), and a committee of **Arni Jonsson, Hordur Arnarson, Sigurdur Petursson** and **Karl Karlsson**.



A group of Icelandic PGA members

**The Climate:** The golf season is reckoned to last about five months a year, but with the current rising temperatures there are signs that this may be extending. For approximately two months or so each year there is round-the-clock daylight, thereby providing endless hours of potential golfing time.

Average temperature in the summer is reckoned to be about 15° C. As you head North, however, from the main centre around Reykjavik, conditions can deteriorate....'Global warming may be helping golf, but it is not what we want to see.

"Our glaciers are melting... it's less cold now, but it's not slowed down the wind..." says Arnar wryly.

### Did You Know?

- **Golf is the second sport to football as the country's most popular, with extensive coverage in the press and on TV.**
- **Golf in Iceland has possibly one of the highest penetration ratios per head of population in the world, with its 3,000 players amounting to 10% of the entire population.**
- There are many pay-as-you-play facilities there, and golf is regarded as being 'very inexpensive' to play. Club membership can be as little as the equivalent of £300 per year.
- **Course quality gets 'better and better' all of the time because of greenkeepers having gained more information about the best-practice agronomy of the climate.**
- **More golf holes are needed and the demand is gradually being met. A Nick Faldo course is under construction. He is the first big name foreign architect to have a scheme there.**
- Ex-Ryder Cup player John Garner, a short-game specialist, was the first well-known coach to work in Iceland.

### PGA of Iceland

#### The Figures of Growth:

	2000	2007
No. of golf facilities	50	61
No. of players	7,200	30,000
No. of Professionals PGA qualified	1	12
Playing professionals	0	6
Unqualified professionals	4	24
Number of trainees	0	10

#### Officials:

President: **Arnar Már Ólafsson**  
 Secretary: **Derrick Moore**  
 Treasurer: **Úlfar Jónsson**  
 Head of Education: **Arnar Már Ólafsson**  
 Ladies: **Ragnhildur Sigurdardóttir**