



PGA OF ISRAEL

The 22nd instalment of a series that takes a random look at each member PGA in turn.

Hopes are High as Caesarea Course Re-Opens

When reports and images emanating from the Middle East in these troubled times seem inevitably to be of political conflict, it is a joy to offer here the good news from Israel not only that golf is alive but that its future looks bright.

Just around the time that this newsletter is due to be distributed, the country's only 18-hole course at Caesarea will be re-opening after a frustrating but progressive two years when it has been 'totally bulldozed' and re-designed by the world renowned architect, Pete Dye.

In addition to this, permission may be granted to add a further nine holes to the existing nine-hole course at Gaash... a decision that would confirm that the Israeli government is becoming aware of the social and economic benefits that are enjoyed by EVERY nation that encourages a golfing culture.

The PGA of Israel was formed in 1985 and later became International Members of The PGAs of Europe. At no time in this



24-year period has it been easy to establish professional golf in this comparatively young country where territorial disputes with its neighbours are almost a way of life.

Young men and women have to undergo a period of national military service and some become regulars in an army that seems to be almost permanently on red alert. Also, as in so many countries, football is the sport that captures the interest of the majority.

Yet golf is not new in Israel. Caesarea GC, home of the Federation, dates back to 1961, when it was designed by Fred Smith, and Gaash followed some ten years ago. It was during the 1990s that a drive to take golf to the schools and to thereby spread the sport's popularity among the young was led by Dr Ricardo Cordoba-Core. (Dr Cordoba-Core received a PGAs of Europe 5-Star Professional award for his efforts)

All this means that the ultimate good news from Israel is that the Federation and the PGA are working together to teach kids how to play golf... before the army has to show them how to fight.

"Golf is ready to take off. But we need more courses..."

Basil Katz, the Head Professional at the Gaash Golf Club is one of the comparatively small, but enthusiastic membership of the The PGA of Israel, who are working steadfastly to grow the sport in a country where there is significant potential for expansion ... subject to state co-operation. Here Basil supplies the answers to some of the relevant questions put to him by *Working Together*.

WT: Has your PGA grown?

BK: "As a result of the criteria established by the PGAs of Europe regarding membership guidelines for who can be deemed a PGA member and the fact that we only have two facilities, our membership will decrease from 18 to 11 on July 31, 2009 when we put the rules into effect

WT: Has your Education Programme progressed?

BK: It certainly has, with the help of the visit by Gary Alliss last October. We look forward to another visit in the not-too-distant future. We are also complying with the requirements of our Government sports department that requires us to pass a course in Anatomy, Physiology, Sports Psychology & First-Aid.

Q: What is your PGAs immediate aim ?

BK: We are working hard to build our credibility and hope to stage an international pro am on the re-designed Caesarea course, which is looking great now. For this reason we are delighted to be featured in this PGAs of Europe newsletter.



WT: One of the major improvements in many PGAs is a new sense of co-operation with their amateur body. How is your relationship with the Golf Federation of Israel?

BK: We are gaining in recognition to such an extent that with the support and financial backing from the Federation we have established *The PGA of Israel Junior Academy* which will function out of Gaash Golf Club. Gaash is charging us for the use of their facility but as a member of the Federation this is a huge step forward for us. Andrew Santos and I, the head professionals of the two clubs, sit on the executive of the Federation as advisors.

WT: Is golf becoming more or less popular in Israel?

BK: Golf is growing steadily but, with only the nine-hole facility at Gaash available for the last two years (due to the re-designing of Caesarea) the strain has been felt. A tremendous amount of work has been taking place in an endeavor to create additional facilities. Our Government's Department of Tourism has, at this point, taken note of the benefit of golf to the community at large. Previously golf has not found favour with them. Any desire to create new courses has been stifled. Hopefully this will now change and the first indication of this would be permission to build a further nine holes at Gaash. We are holding our breath...

WT: To the outside world looking in, at the news bulletins from the Middle-East, the impression would be that golf must be seriously affected by international politics. How does it impact on you in reality?

BK: On a day-to-day basis our lives on the golf course are not affected by politics at all,

except with the problem of building additional golf courses. The fact that our young men have to serve three years in the army, and young women for two years, has some affect but not too seriously on the elite players. Should a young talented golfer be chosen to play in a European junior event, for example, he or she would be supported by the Federation and would be given a great deal of time off by the army to practice and to play..

WT: Do you have some promising juniors coming through?

BK: We have a 16-year-old girl (Leticia Beck) who has an international ranking & who participates in many junior events. She will be due to serve in the army, but her golf will not be unduly affected by it. We also have a few boys who are sent to participate in junior events. Remember that although golf has been played for many years at Caesarea it has only been since 1999, when Gaash GC came into being, that golf really started being recognised because it is ideally positioned, close to the largest city Tel Aviv and easily accessed from a main highway. Many companies send their staff for group introductory lessons. As a result our PGA Professionals have a continuous stream of new golfers to teach. Unfortunately not enough of them become regular players due to the shortage of facilities.

WT: How do you see future prospects for golf in Israel ?

BK: Although there is a much improved awareness of the sport, we still probably only have about 1200 active golfers. The future potential is great...but we do need the government to recognise the benefits of the game to society so that more courses can be built.

PGA of Israel The Facts

	2000	2009
Number of Facilities	2	2
Number of Players	1,510	2000
Number of Professionals	7	11

OFFICIALS

President: **Basil Katz**
 Vice President: **Andrew Santos**
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 Treasurer: **Basil Katz**