

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Junior Golf

By Stephen Somerville

An event that occurred a couple of weeks back provided me with a nice family memory that will stay with me for the rest of my life. My ten-year-old son was playing in his first golf tournament.

I had been occasionally taking Ryan to the golf range over the years, but for some reason, last spring he became very interested in the sport and was joining me in watching the various PGA and LPGA events on the Golf Channel.

Last summer we played the short course at Kettle Creek a number of times. Then, in August, he joined me on the big course for the first time when we teed it up at St. Andrew's Valley.

Julie took a great picture of Ryan and me on the first tee at St. Andrew's, which I treasure.

Ryan has been playing with Julie and me a number of times and has joined me in playing with other adults, but he had never been in competition or played against his own age group.

I went on line last fall after I had heard about the Canadian Junior Golf Association (CJGA), which is responsible for Junior Golf in Canada and operates a number of age specific tournaments across Canada.

After checking out their website, I enrolled Ryan as a member for the 2014 season.

There are sixteen tournaments across Ontario for the Junior Linksters Program, running every week from early May until the end of September. Although there is one tournament in Windsor and in London, most of them are easily reachable from Aurora within an hour or so; hopefully Ryan can play in eight or so tourneys this year.

The CJGA has even introduced an Award of Merit, which is a season-long-run based on the participants best finishes.

The CJGA divide the boys and girls into separate age categories. The courses are set up to match the age of the children. For instance, this past week the boys 9-10 and 11-13 both played off a 4,000 yard course but the par was 72 for the 9-10-year-olds and 65 for the older children.

Ryan wanted to play the first tournament at Rolling Hills, so I entered him. We showed up on the morning of Sunday, May 4, not sure what to expect, other than knowing that Ryan had a 9.24 a.m. tee off with two other children.

The set-up is just like a PGA tour event. The children keep track of one of their competitor's score in addition to their own.

They are allowed to have caddies, but the caddies are not allowed on the tee boxes or on to the greens.

Ryan, Julie and I had a great time that day. Ryan had a lot of fun playing with and against two other children.

But my greatest memory was on the first tee. There are lots of competitors and other parents standing around.

The Starter announced to everyone that this was the 9:24 a.m. pairing and then he introduced the other players one by one and they teed off. Then he said "From Aurora, Ontario, Ryan Somerville," and everyone in the small gathered crowd clapped.

It was just like on the PGA Tour; one of the officials held up the "QUIET" sign and Ryan addressed his ball, took a practice swing, a deep breath and then nailed a nice drive, just slightly off to the right of the fairway in the first cut of rough and we were off.

Watching him do this and also seeing his smile as he handed me the club and walk down the fairway is something I will never forget.

I am not under any illusions that Ryan is going to the PGA Tour any time soon, but he really seems to enjoy the game the way that I do and I hope that this is the start of a lifelong appreciation and enjoyment of the game.

And it is a game that our whole family enjoys and is playing together.

At the end of the round, after he had shaken hands with his competitors and their respective mothers and fathers, just like on the Tour, he had to go to the Official Scoring Tent to sign his scorecard.

When he came out he said that he had a great time and then said "Dad, can I please play in the Oakville Tournament next week?" We are headed to Oakville.

If your son or daughter likes the game of golf and would like to compete against others, irrespective of their level of play, then you should check out the CJGA website.

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