



THE ORIGINAL MALAYAN OPEN



As Members wait in anticipation for the Maybank Championship Malaysia 2016, the first major professional golf tournament to be held at the Club for a long time, I think back to 1962 when the Club held its first professional golf tournament – the Malayan Open Golf Championship (now known as Malaysian Open). You must remember that as a young newly independent country, Malaysians had only just taken up the game. The Club was full of golf enthusiasts, hungry to improve their games and to see golf played by top golfers.

Every day after work, the courses would be occupied by Royalty, Ministers, diplomats, civil servants and other Members. One would hear bets being made in the dressing room. So imagine the enthusiasm and excitement of the Members over the first professional golfers tournament to be ever held in the country. Encouraged by the Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, the President of the Federation of Malaya Golf Association, Nobby Clarke headed a raw but very keen Organising Committee of top members of the community to organise the event.

By Thomas Lee

Everything had to be done by the Club Members from raising the sponsorship money to arranging the accommodation for the pros at the homes of the Members. The tournament director and all the Committee members in charge of the rules on the golf course, the caddies, the reception and immigration were Members. Course Marshalls and scorers were also Members or their wives. There was no professional help. No one was paid anything, but we all chipped in.

Edmund Yong used to close his legal office for three weeks year after year to be Tournament Director. He had an incredible memory for the Rules of Golf, and was as good as any professional tournament director. When he retired, the Malaysian Open had the reputation of being the best run tournament in our part of the world. Another past captain Tan Kok Kee continued the good work. By that time, RSGC had become known throughout the world.

The Malaysian Open happened when the Golf Association decided to join the Far East Circuit, which consisted of the Taiwan Open, the Hong Kong Open and the Philippine Open.

The pros came mainly from Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and Australia, with a few from Britain. The American players came much later. In the 1960s, none of the pros made much money in their countries and the pros had to venture abroad. Imagine the total purse of the first Malaysian Open in 1962 was only RM 22,500. The first prize was RM3,000, which was won by Frank Phillips of Australia, with Peter Thomson and Bob Charles coming second. Thomson and Charles were famous golfers, both winners of the British Open, as was Kel Nagle. Thomson was indeed a



Left:
The Malayan Championship trophy, presented by the Malayan Golf Association just after its formation

five-time winner of the British Open. Other famous Australian winners were Billy Dunk, Graham Marsh, Stewart Ginn and Terry Gale. Asians were not to be denied and notable winners were Lu Hsi Chuen, Lu Chien Soon and Hsu Sheng San from Taiwan, Ben Arda and Legaspi from the Philippines, Tammo Ishii, Hosoishi, T. Kono, Murakami and Sugimoto from Japan.

Much later, the Americans would start winning, together with famous players like Vijay Singh, Thongchai Jaidee and Lee Westwood. But they did not play at RSGC.

The closest a Malaysian player got to winning was P. Gunasegaran, who lost in a play-off with Joakim Haeggman of Sweden in 1994. I remember that play-off well which included Frank Nobile of New Zealand, now a well-known golf commentator. We were hoping that Guna would win. One of the players that I remember was Mike Dunaway, famous for his long driving. In a practice round, he used an iron on the first tee of the New Course (before it was rearranged) and drove his ball through the Club's gate. Dunaway later started the 350 Club in the USA, open to those who

could drive 350 yards.

Another memorable player was Gene Littler. He was a star player on the US PGA Tour in the 1960s and 1970s, and known for his great swing. He had an aura and presence of a film star and stayed with my brother Alex. Despite his film star status (he was a US Open winner and played in many Ryder Cups), he was a very nice man and obliged us with a golf clinic. Other notable players who played at RSGC but did not win were Isao Aoki and Jumbo Ozaki, both very famous Japanese players and David Graham of Australia, later winner of the US Open.

In the first 25 years of the Malaysian Open, it was only played outside RSGC twice. Indeed the Malaysian Open and the Malaysian Golf Association were very much part of RSGC. Unlike nowadays, when we are exposed to so much golf, especially on TV, the Malaysian Open was looked upon by the Members of RSGC as something which was a part of them. Not just as spectators, but as owners who contributed time and sweat to make the event successful. We all agonised when the rain clouds appeared, worrying if we would finish the event. And when the prize presentation was concluded, the Club house was full of merrymaking and celebrations!

Right:
Bob Lauriston won the Malayan Championship 1948

