

South African Blind Golf Association (SABGA)

ISPS Handa SA Open & IBGA World Championships – 2023

The 2023 ISPS Handa SA Blind Golf Open and International Blind Golf Association (IBGA) World Championships were staged at the picturesque Milnerton Golf Club in Cape Town at the end of March. The IBGA World Championships, the first to be held on the continent of Africa, were long overdue having been initially planned to take place in 2020. The outbreak of the COVID pandemic resulted in several postponements before the world's best blind golfers could eventually gather in Cape Town for the event.

The Course



Milnerton Golf Course is an 18-hole, par 72, challenging links course situated 10 minutes north of the city of Cape Town.

Nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Diep River lagoon, which border most holes, the course offers a unique golf experience. On most holes, the sound of the waves breaking on the shore just metres away can be heard. The spectacular view of Table Mountain from almost every hole is breath-taking.

The ISPS Handa SA Open

Despite several late withdrawals, 39 of the world's best blind golfers teed it up for the event. This is by far the largest field of blind golfers which have participated in the SA Open.

On the ladies side, there were only four competitors, which provided a great opportunity for a couple of the rising stars of the game to show their talents. Local player, Charlene Pienaar (guided by Rachel Howard) did not disappoint. With very solid play Charlene won the ladies' gross and net titles, ahead of Austria's Karin Becker (gross) and Northern Ireland's Jan Dinsdale (net).

In the B3 men's category, Canadian Kiefer Jones (guided by mum, Deb) again showed off his talents and led from start to finish. John Eakin from England claimed the runner-up spot ahead of Australia's Paul McKenzie.

In the B2 men's category, the talented youngster Tyler Cashman (aged 20, and guided by grandfather George) finished ahead of Englishmen Andy Gilford and Steve Beevers, with South African Garrett Slattery in fourth.

The B1 men's title was won by Spaniard Alejandro de Miguel (guided by Javier Parrilla), who caused an upset by beating B1 World Champion Zohar Sharon (from Israel, guided once again by Shimshon Levi). Zohar finished as runner-up, with US player Mario Tobia in third.

In the men's net (across all sight categories), the top three places went to Tyler Cashman who was two shots ahead of John Eakin (runner-up) and Paul McKenzie (third). South Africa's Garrett Slattery finished fourth.

The IBGA World Championships

Following a rest day, where many players and guides were able to see the sights in and around Cape Town, the IBGA World Championships got under way. This event, which is the pinnacle on the blind golf calendar is (normally) held every two years. 41 players, from 12 different countries, made up the high quality field.

The first day, as in the SA Open, saw the course in great condition. The wind, although only moderate by Milnerton standards, again made the inward 9 very challenging – with most players taking many more shots to come in than they had on their way out. The final day saw the winds really pick up with a strong south-easter facing players on the final 9 holes. Almost everyone struggled on the way in.

In the ladies' category, South African Charlene Pienaar held off a spirited challenge from Austria's Karin Becker to bring the B3 gross crown to South Africa. In doing so she becomes the first South African disabled lady golfer to win a world title. After Pieta le Roux (IBGA B2 Champion in 2008) and Garrett Slattery (IBGA B2 Champion in 2014), Charlene is SA Blind Golf's third IBGA World Champion.

In the ladies' net, Karin Becker edged home by one shot over Northern Ireland's Jan Dinsdale to win Austria's first blind golf World title.

In the B3 men's category it was very much as you were in the SA Open, with Canadian Kiefer Jones again putting on a dazzling display to finish ahead of Englishman John Eakin and Australian Paul McKenzie.

In the B2 men's category, the top four players from the SA Open again finished in the top four, but the order was shuffled round. England's Andy Gilford won his first World title with two very solid rounds, keeping out the newly crowned SA Open B2

Champion, USA's Tyler Cashman. In the battle for third, South Africa's Garrett Slattery edged out England's Steve Beevers.

In the men's B1 category Zohar Sharon from Israel, the defending B1 World Champion had the first round lead over the SA B1 Champion, Spaniard Alejandro de Miguel. Fortunes changed on the final day, however, with Alejandro putting in a good round to eclipse Zohar and thus to take his first World title.

Finally, in the men's overall net category, Englishman John Eakin (guided by club caddie, Leon) put together two very solid rounds to claim his first World title. John finished three shots ahead of South African Garrett Slattery with another Englishman, Andy Gilford a further shot back in third.

The Organisation & Sponsors

The SA Blind Golf Association would like to express our sincere thanks to all of those people and organisations who provided financial and other support which made this event possible.

Having spent over five years in the planning for this event, SABGA were immensely relieved to see everything go off so well. Even the notoriously unpredictable Cape weather played its part.

The financial support from the IBGA was pivotal to the success of this event, and we express our sincere thanks to the IBGA Board of Directors and Member associations, as well as to Dr Handa who has made international golf for the blind viable.

To Kevin Malan at the Western Cape Department of Culture and Sport (DCAS) for his ongoing support and for facilitating the DCAS sponsorship, many thanks.

A huge thanks go to the SA Organising Committee, led for several years of this endeavour by Ernst Conradie. A couple of months before the events, Ernst handed over to Jurie Maré to take the lead as Tournament Director. I'm sure all who were at the event will echo our praise for the fantastic work carried out by Jurie, often under trying circumstances.

We were aided by very energetic volunteers at the event in the form of Angie van Staden and Megan Conradie, who were on daily duty. Others at the event, notably Casey and Cyndy Cashman were always willing to lend a hand. The Nomads were ever-present to collect and check the scorecards, to make sure everything was done as it should be when it comes to score recording. Many thanks to them for their hours of work.

A special thanks to Canadian Kevin Lemmon. When Kevin let us know that he would be coming to the event and was willing to lend a hand where he could, we took (more than) full advantage of the offer. Kevin was busy the entire week, acting as starter, arranging carts, serving as marshal on the course and then acting as Master of Ceremonies at our prize-giving dinners. Kevin, just let us know when you'd like to move to South Africa on a more permanent basis.

The Milnerton Golf Club, through manager Mark, golf Director Kyle, and all of the pro shop, bar and catering staff, were fantastic and made us feel right at home the whole week. Thanks to the club caddies and spotters who did great work in helping get the golfers around the course. Thanks of course also to the Milnerton members, who gave us the use of their spectacular course for the week.

The Lagoon Beach Hotel management and staff have treated us superbly for several years, from the time we first approached them over five years ago to the week of the event itself. I'm sure many of our guests will be back to the hotel in years to come.

Nic Lanham from Albatros Solutions, provided the live scoring for us for the week. This provided a new facet to the events, with the scores not only going up on the large screen TV in the clubhouse, but also being posted on links on the SABGA Facebook page which allowed people to follow the events from all round the world. Nic worked late into the evening most nights and also assisted us in putting together the draw for the next day's play. Many thanks to Nic for his commitment.

Thanks to the SA Disable Golf Association, Western Province Golf Union, and Golf RSA for their support. Thanks to Mickey Snyman for offering her expertise to act as official Referee and member of the Tournament Committee. Thanks too to the Western Province ladies who went out every day to act as scorers.

The use of a vehicle from SADGA, with ever-friendly driver Charlie, as well as visits from Lily to the club were appreciated. UCT, through Jess and Moyo, were also of great help on the transports side, providing us with the large bus for daily transport.

The long-standing support of TaylorMade is also greatly appreciated, again providing golf balls for all at the event. Food sponsorship from Pick 'n Pay and the tremendous assistance from the Table View Lions Club to help pack and distribute lunches was appreciated by all.

We also had some of the local wine estates donate some great wines. Of particular note here, Christian from Beyerskloof who also put on a wine tasting for us all on the first afternoon. Other wine estates which contributed included: Durbanville Hills, Hazendal, Stellenview, Thelema and Vergenoegd.

We also had tremendous media support. Lali Stander worked tirelessly to get reports on the events out to a very wide distribution network. This is something we could never have managed were it not for her drive and enthusiasm. Craig Sturton (from SADGA) also played a big part in spreading the word about the event.

Thanks too go to Louis Hattingh and the SuperSport television crew for taking the time to come down to record some highlights. The media coverage we have had has been truly world class, so thanks to all involved.

As a final thank you, we the blind golfers give thanks to that dedicated group of people without whom none of this would have been possible, our guides. I can only imagine

how frustrating it must be when your golfer once again hits the ball somewhere other than you aimed them. Keep up the good work!

Until we meet again, as a final reminder and lure to bring you all back again – sunset as seen from the hotel:

