



# golfing it up!

**T**HE name golf is widely believed to have been derived from the old Scots verb "to gowff" meaning to "strike hard." The earliest known written detail on the subject of golf is from King James II in 1457 who demanded that "fute-ball and golfe be utterly cryed down and not to be used." The King was concerned that his citizens were so involved in leisurely pursuits that they were neglecting the Royal and vital sport of archery, which would protect him from the enemy!

Scotland also, is widely associated as the birthplace and home of golf and some form of golf is believed to have been played there for nearly three hundred years.

Golf therefore has always enjoyed the attention (negative it may be!) of royalty. So it is of little surprise that even now, some three centuries later, the sport of golf is commonly associated with the elite and privileged members of the society.

Golf has over the past few years seeped its way into the Bangladeshi sporting radar with more and more people taking an active interest.

The stereotypical image of golfers is well dressed, uptight, retired,

gentlemenn, with all the time of the world on their hands and enough money in their pockets to buy themselves a few more rounds of the game that they seemingly so enjoy playing. But Shawkat uz-Zaman, industrialist and avid amateur golfer, is quick to dispel that notion.

"Golf is an expensive sport," he readily admits, "but there are reasons for it."

"First of all it is important to note that golf is a very terrain specific sport which means that it cannot be played just anywhere. There needs to be wide expanses of land available to build a course and this takes up a lot of money. For that reason alone membership fees to the Kurmitola Golf Club (in Dhaka) is on the high end of the spectrum."

He also admits that golf is not for the masses. "It is true that golf is an elitist sport. There is no doubt about it but the fact remains that more and more people are taking an active interest in it. It will never be a sport for everyone to play but the level of interest has definitely taken an upturn."

It is slightly ironic that the charm of golf lies in the fact that it is viewed by many as being an elitist sport. "There is a certain snob appeal associated with the game," says the smiling Shawkat. "Its

attraction lies in its exclusivity."

Clothes maketh the man and a golfer is a prime example of that adage. A golfer always has to be smart. There are no specific guidelines for dressing in particular but no golfer can wear round necked T-shirts. It is a rule set down by golf's governing body that they have to be sporting collared shirts. A variation of the collared shirt is a high collar t-shirt which is something that Tiger Woods has made very popular over the past few years.

As far as pants go, there are different variations with many choosing to wear shorts on the courses while others go for tracks or slacks. Still others choose to play wearing trousers. Footwear is imperative. Sneakers are allowed but they slip on the grass which can cause errors in shot making. Therefore most footwear has rubber spikes to help with traction.

The Kurmitola Golf Club is a place frequented by the rich and famous. Understandable since membership fees are through the roof. However, the money paid is not for nothing, facilities are par excellence.

"We have here almost everything that is mandatory in a club and

then some. There are eighteen holes (eighteen courses) with different difficulty levels assigned to each hole. We have a driving range where golfers can practice their swing, several putting greens where golfers practice dinking the ball in from close range and we have caddies to help out new players."

And all that is just related to golf. Separate facilities include swimming pools, restaurants, a hall for arranging parties, a gym and even a football field. In short everything that one envisions in a good club is available.

Golf has also taken a turn for the serious here with a number of amateurs flirting with the idea of turning professional. One such who has to be mentioned is Siddik Rahim who has won a few tournaments in and around the sub-continent and looks likely to turn pro shortly. However the rules that govern golf are intricate and the transition to pro could take a while and a lot of decision making.

"Golf is also good for the mind," says Abu Sayeed, another avid golfer who has been playing the game since his retirement. "I have a lot of time on my hand so a few rounds of golf, does me good. Plus it also keeps the brain thinking as there is a lot of planning involved.

Finally it also helps me keep my competitive spirit as I always want to beat my competitor. And on the bright side...what better place to go for a walk than a golf course."

An old American proverb goes, "All is fair in love and golf." It goes to show the amount of effort and competitiveness that golfers usually put into games. By a unique handicap system golf is the one sport that allows players of different skill levels to compete on the same footing. Therefore competition is always heavy. It may look relaxing and it is but there is no shortage of competitiveness as many may assume.

Golf has successfully integrated itself into the lifestyle of people in Bangladesh and Shawkat ul Zaman is confident that it will continue to do so in the near future.

I end with the words of Arthur Daley who once famously said, "Golf is like a love affair. If you don't take it seriously, it's no fun; if you do take it seriously, it breaks your heart."

By Quazi Zulquarnain Islam  
Photo: Munem Wasif

