Naas Golf Club: Young Female Players

At a Glance ...
★ Naas needed to attract more young female members to the Club to redress a gender imbalance.
★ Its “Try Golf Days” are promoted by existing members to girls with an existing interest in golf.
★ With an emphasis on having fun, the days are highly successful in recruiting girls as well as their family members.
★ The girls wear coordinating monogrammed pink tops to set them apart from the Ladies Section.

The Issue:
Naas Golf Club is a traditional parkland course located in County Kildare, Ireland. It was founded in 1896 and has more than 1,000 members. In recent years the average age of the female members has been rising and no younger members were joining. The Club decided to take action to address the gender imbalance, in an attempt to attract younger females to the game and to the Naas Golf Club.

The Solution:
First of all, the Club participated in a “Girls in Golf” initiative through Junior Golf Ireland. Eighteen girls aged between ten and twelve years were recruited from a local primary school. Though this involved a significant amount of work, the efforts resulted in six girls joining the Club and playing for another two years. Several years on, one of the girls remains a member and has introduced her younger brother and sister to the game.

As a second recruitment initiative, during the pre-season period October 2013 to January 2014, “Try Golf Days” were held for girls who already had an interest in golf. These days were promoted only through word of mouth, by the existing youth girl members and their friends. The girls came to the Club and met with volunteers and the Club’s pro. They hit balls, putted and generally had a good time. The initiative was a huge success and by the end of the 2014 season the Club had thirty-one girls regularly playing and participating in coaching.

The girls each wear a youthful bright pink fleece or hoodie, depending on their age. The tops are very distinctive and bear the Club crest and the girl’s initials. The Ladies felt that it was important for the girls to have their own identity apart from the mature women – and it works, the girls reportedly love their team look!

"Naas Golf Club tried two approaches to attract youth girls to the Club. The more successful initiative invited friends of the existing members to attend “Try Golf Days” at the Club. These were all about having fun! They were hugely successful, resulted in many new girl members, and will be repeated next season."

The Club Youth Committee also run regular Family Foursomes at weekends, usually monthly. This encourages family members and the children to play together.

Implementation:
The “Try Golf Days” were a very positive experience for Naas Golf Club. Every girl who joined had played previously, knew other girls taking part in the scheme and already had basic golf skills.
There were additional spin off benefits: some parents started to take an interest in golf, younger siblings also joined and several prospective new members are lined up for next season.

**Impacts:**
Naas now has 31 girls in distinctive categories:
- Handicaps 36 and under;
- Congu handicaps of 36 (though not playing to 36), all of whom have a domestic handicap;
- Aged 11 and under – known as “Birdies” – who play fun golf and games each week.

**Next Steps:**
The Club will continue with the “Try Golf Days” and with the right support the girls will move seamlessly between the groups. The Juniors’ organiser and the Ladies’ Committee are currently discussing future plans for the Club’s girls. One initiative under consideration is to give all of the girls the opportunity to play regular fun golf on ladies’ day during the summer evenings of school term. The Club hopes that this will help to prepare the girls and leave them keen for the season proper.

**Tips & Advice:**
Naas has shared a number of tips for other Clubs considering a similar initiative to appeal to youth girl players:
- Encourage girls to join with other girls;
- Pair them or group them with their relevant age group, at least until their level of golf merits moving on;
- Keep golf fun for younger girls;
- Allow girls to have fun competitions, scrambles, etc., especially when they’re at the beginner stage;
- Encourage older girls to help out with the younger girls.

**A final word from Naas Golf Club:**
Through the implementation of the two initiatives, Naas Golf Club has significantly increased the number of girls in its membership and its Committee is proud to have nurtured the game in so many young people. A spokeswoman for the Club hopes that the senior members enjoy having young members in the Club and that it continues to be a positive experience for everyone.

Based on surveys and follow up interviews, the UK and Ireland’s Golf Home Unions have identified and showcased examples of “what works” in golf club management in a series of case studies. The focus has been on clubs that have been successful in achieving more players, more members and stronger clubs. The intention is to share information and guidance on effective practices in business planning, customer service, membership, and women’s and girls’ golf. For further information about this and other case studies and for further support, please go to [www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com](http://www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com).