



A History of The Optimist

Since 1978, Optimist-sponsored golf tournaments have served as a springboard for many of golf's greatest players. 2010 Masters Champion Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els, Nancy Lopez, Davis Love III, Michelle McGann, Lorena Ochoa and Tiger Woods are just a few of today's elite players who found their humble beginnings with the Optimists.

No other junior golf tournament quite compares to the Optimist International Junior Golf Championships, which focuses on fair competition and cultural understanding among youth. This unique tournament offers as broad a field and expanded age groups as any other in its class.

This world-class event originated in 1968 when three leaders of the San Diego County Junior Golf Association—Norrie West, Mrs. A.S. Smith and John Brown—carried out Brown's idea of forming Junior World Golf. "I just thought it would be a great thing if young people from throughout the world could meet each other and play with each other in an international junior golf tournament," Brown said.

That first year, Junior World drew entries from only six foreign nations: Pakistan, Canada, Mexico, Thailand, Portugal and the Philippines. In all, 475 golfers came from 20 states and seven nations. Then, in 1978, through the action of Dudley Williams, a lifelong San Diego resident and soon-to-be President of Optimist International, the Optimists became a sponsor of the event, thus creating "Optimist Junior World." Through this partnership, Optimist International began holding qualifying tournaments for 15- to 17-year-olds across the United States and Canada. As a result, 55 tournaments drew more than 3,500 entrants.

In an effort to expand the tournament, Optimist International moved the event to South Florida's Doral Golf Resort & Spa in 1995 and renamed the event the Optimist International Junior Golf Championships. The plan proved so successful that after only one year, The Optimist moved again to a much larger site at PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens.

Now in its 16th year at PGA National, the Optimist International Junior Golf Championships continues to be one of the fastest-growing junior tournaments in the world with thousands of golfers, ages 10-18, participating in more than 55 qualifying tournaments. In 1999, The Optimist expanded to a two-tournament format to accommodate the increasing number of participants. Annually more than 600 of the best junior golfers, representing more than 30 nations, 35 states and five Canadian provinces, converge for a week of unsurpassed competition, fellowship and fun.