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Fore! Kids get into the swing of golfing Program encourages youths to take up sport

BY WASIM AHMAD
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While the pros were taking the field at the B.C. Open, about 250 Greater Binghamton children were getting the chance to golf for themselves, many for the first time in their lives.

The children — from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Binghamton, Endicott, and Owego; the Broome County Urban League; and the Wyoming Conference Children's Home — participated in a youth golf clinic sponsored by PGA Tour and USA Network. The free five-week clinic, run by the Long Island-based Multicultural Golf Association of America, gives youth ages 7 to 17 an opportunity to do something that they normally wouldn't think of doing.

"I wouldn't have taken him to a golf course until this program," said Pamela Hatchett-Rogers of Binghamton, whose son, Cheyo Rogers, 9, is in the program. "Now he's asking me to come back. He says I'm going to be his caddy, but I won't let him drive the golf carts yet."

The kids have been practicing once a week for the last five weeks at the Links at Hiawatha Landing in Apalachin. They learned putting, chipping and driving, and they even got to spend a day at the BC Open. They also learned the 3 D's — dedication, determination and desire, said MGAA Field Manager Greg Hawk.

"It's a recipe for success," he said.



Morgan Hampton, 10, of Binghamton celebrates sinking a 10-foot putt Thursday during the PGA Tour/USA Network Youth Golf Clinic at Links at Hiawatha Landing in Apalachin.

Photos by KATHRYN DEUEL / Press & Sun-Bulletin

The lessons learned on the course are the same skills that the kids can apply to life, Hawk said.

For their last week of practice, the kids competed for two \$500 scholarships toward private golf instruction, one for boys and one for girls. The MGAA runs many similar clinics in many locations where there are PGA Tour-sponsored events.

They competed in driving, chipping and putting contests. One participant said she learned a unique strategy to succeed.

“I look at it as something is on the other side and I’m trying to get something into it,” said Heather Varsik, 9, of Binghamton.

At the end of the clinic, each child gets a free set of golf clubs for participating and passes to play for free on the smaller three-hole course at the Links at Hiawatha Landing.

Robby Sostre, 13, of Binghamton, took two swings at the putting challenge, and though he didn’t get the hole-in-one he was hoping for, he looked like a miniature Tiger Woods stepping up to the tee and taking two practice swings before taking a shot. He said he had no interest in golf before the camp, but that changed.

“It’s not like a competition,” Sostre said. “You can just play to have fun and it doesn’t take up too much energy.”



Robby Sostre, 13, (left to right) Joe Gray, 12, watch Jeremy Sostre, 11, all of Binghamton, putt the ball Thursday during the PGA Tour/USA Network Youth Golf Clinic at Links at Hiawatha Landing in Apalachin.



Joshua Hail, 8, of Johnson City drives the ball during the PGA Tour/USA Network Youth Golf Clinic in Apalachin.