

Inaugural Ontario Junior Girls' 'She Plays Golf' festival hosted by TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley

By Jim Stewart

Eighteen Junior Girls took part in the 'She Plays Golf' Festival at TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley on Saturday morning.

Friday's session with 24 participants was rained out so the radiant sunshine and ideal breezy conditions were welcomed by organizers of the RBC-sponsored event.

The initiative expanded to British Columbia and Ontario this year building upon the Calgary-based pilot festival launched in 2023. In addition to Osprey Valley, 'She Plays Golf' events were held simultaneously this week at Lionhead Golf Club and Humber Valley Golf Course.

The festivals feature inclusive programming for women and girls, addressing gaps in golf's participation pathway.

Katherine Hale, Manager of Women's Participation for Golf Canada, noted that 'this weekend's event attracted Junior Girl golfers aged six to nine from across the GTA.'

Hale explained the stations used by the event's instructors.

'We have three stations set up for putting, chipping, and full swings.'

It was evident that the young golfers enjoyed the personal and upbeat instruction at the stations set up across Osprey Valley's practice range. Two youthful instructors encouraged, taught, and positively reinforced the six juniors at each station.

Hale's on-course colleague, Laura Wilson, cast a supervisory eye over the proceedings at each of the stations and said she liked what she saw.

'I love creating a safe, fun, and judgement-free environment for our new golfers with women-only leaders and instructors for the women-only participants.'

Wilson, in her fourth year as Director of Inclusion Programs and Safe Sport for Golf Canada, praised the partnership that Golf Canada and 'She Plays Golf' has struck with Toronto TPC at Osprey Valley.

'The club provides such a welcoming environment. They're such great partners who are behind the 'She Plays Golf' program 100%. This is our first year in Ontario following up on the program's success in our inaugural event in Calgary last year. Osprey Valley has supported the First Tee program, too, since it started in 2022 for young boys and girls ages five to eighteen. These junior golf programs really promote the sport. We couldn't ask for a better partner.'

TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley is one of 35 sites across Canada providing access to the First Tee and Youth on Course programs, engaging more than 20,000 young golfers since its launch two years ago.

The course's perfectly-manicured fairways and greens make it an ideal setting to induce young golfers, as is their engaging and welcoming clubhouse. It's filled with museum exhibits including a glass case featuring Adam Hadwin's famous green hoodie that he wore when he was tackled by a security guard while celebrating Nick Taylor's historical victory at the Canadian Open. Even the cork from the champagne bottle with which Hadwin christened Taylor is preserved for posterity. Also included in the clubhouse's exhibits are memorabilia connected to Brooke Henderson Canada's winningest professional golfer with thirteen LPGA championships.

Henderson's influence on 'She Plays Golf' and Junior Girls golfers was acknowledged by Wilson.

'It's huge to have Brooke and Alena Sharpe representing Canada at the Olympics this month and winning LPGA events. Having role models is so important for young women. Brooke and Alena are both lovely ambassadors for the game and provide a pathway and inspiration for Canadian women internationally.'

Henderson and Sharpe will represent Canada at the Paris Olympics from August 7-10 at Le Golf National.

The dynamic duo from Smiths Falls and Ancaster, respectively, will appear in their third consecutive Olympics as standard-bearers for an entire nation, including the 'She Plays Golf' participants embracing the game this weekend at Osprey Valley.