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'Driving' forward

By KELSIE JOHNSON, NG Sports Reporter

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The countdown to the first tee-off on the only driving range in the country has started and the Bahamas Golf Federation (BGF) is ready to get the ball in the air.

With an opening date set for mid-July, co-ordinator and executive member of the BGF, Craig Flowers, confirmed that phase one of the three-course project will be open in time for the junior members to practice on before heading to Caribbean Amateur Golf Championships, set to take place in Antigua, from July 8-13.

"We've experienced a lot of challenges with this driving range, but right now we are in the process of growing grass for the range," said Flowers. "The amount of vegetation that was on the property encompassed a lot of poison wood and monkey tamarind, so it was a real challenge for us. We were able to overcome these challenges thanks to the company of Mike Stubbs and his construction team. We are presently growing grass and we're at the stage where the driving range is almost there. The mat area is down so we will be bringing in the mat so we can put them in place in the very near future, a week or two. Some cultivating of the vegetation around is still taking place, so we still have a lot more work to do but it will be ready. I do believe that we were successful in overcoming the challenges that we were presented with and we certainly plan on using it for the preparations of the juniors tournament."

The country's first driving range will differ from those seen on television or on vacation visits to countries abroad. It will

have nine holes and will be a par three golf course. According to Flowers, this particular range will be created as a park where golfers and non-golfers can participate. It will house the federation's administration office, a Pro-shop, club house and a maintenance building.

The driving range is listed under one of several of the bullet points on the BGF's long action agenda list. Also on hand at yesterday's press conference was President Agatha Delancey, who revealed several of the tournaments and activities being planned by the BGF. Delancey believes that the recent growth in the sport, locally and internationally, are among the main reasons why the sport has taken off, even though golfers, particularly in New Providence are faced with a serious disenfranchisement because there's about nowhere to teach, train, practice and play. However, she says the BGF will remain steadfast to its commitment to grow the sport.

She thanked places like the Cable Beach Golf Course, the Ocean Club Golf Course, the Lyford Cay Golf Course and the government for the continuous partnership with the federation. Special thanks was also given to the Inner City Golf Program of Palm Beach, Florida, their president Malachi Knowles, an offspring of The Bahamas and founder of the African American Golfers Hall of Fame.

This continuous partnership will be displayed at the 1st ever Bahamas Junior Open, set to take place June 27-28 at the Ocean Club Golf course. This tournament was the 'brain child' of Thomas 'TJ' Baggett, General Manager at the Ocean Club Golf Course.

"I am personally very excited to be involved in a small part of helping to grow the game and introducing the game to juniors," said Baggett. "I don't think there is a greater game that can be played other than golf to help develop people for life. It is one of the only games that you can learn morals and values because you are calling penalties on yourself. You have to keep track of your own score and learn how to be courteous to other players, so golf is a great game and any time we have a chance to introduce it to kids it is a great opportunity," he added.

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