



Singapore's top golfer Mardan Mamat showing his young proteges – (from left) Leverett Chua, Joey Poh and Muhd Syabil Abdul Kadir – how it is done. The teenagers were selected for their talent, ambition and character from 400 budding talents in the Youth Golf Programme. PHOTO: BERITA HARIAN

MARDAN TAKES YOUNG TRIO UNDER HIS WING

S'pore golfer to groom future champs through Youth Golf Programme

By SANJAY NAIR

WHILE his friends tracked English Premier League footballers closely, Muhd Syabil Abdul Kadir's idol was closer to home – and played on a different kind of grass.

From the age of 10, he had wanted to follow in the footsteps of Singapore's most successful golfer, Mardan Mamat.

"He was someone I could easily identify with; because of him, I began to love golf and the way it challenges you mentally and physically," said the Montfort Secondary student, now 15.

Syabil, understandably, wore a big smile on his face yesterday when he learnt that the three-time Asian Tour winner will be overseeing the teen's development.

He was among three promising youngsters from the Youth Golf Programme (YGP) who have been selected to train personally under

Mardan, 45.

Along with Leverett Chua, 14, and Joey Poh, 19, they were short-listed from some 400 budding players in the YGP, which teaches the sport to youth who do not have the means to own golf-club memberships but have a keen interest to play.

The scheme is run by volunteers.

On top of weekly YGP lessons, the trio – who were picked for their talent, ambition and character – will also have free weekend training with 19-year pro Mardan at Raffles Country Club.

They will also be inducted into the club's youth set-up, giving them access to its course located at Tuas.

Should they excel under the YGP-Mardan Adoption Scheme – which will gradually increase its intake in the coming years – the trio will be offered exemptions to play on the Asean PGA Tour.

"It costs a lot of money to own

a local club membership so an opportunity like this is truly amazing," said St Gabriel's Secondary student Leverett, who follows his father to Pulai Springs in Johor every weekend to hone his skills.

For Mardan, Singapore's top golfer, the time had come to give back to the grassroots.

"I came from a poor family but had support from the right people, like what YGP is doing now," said the former caddie who was the Republic's first European Tour winner at the 2006 Osim Singapore Masters.

"I've been waiting for this opportunity to develop the next generation of Singapore golfers – I want to fine-tune their game and create future champions."

Since its inception in 1997, the YGP, which was the brain-child of the late Tay Cheng Khoo, ex-sports editor at The Straits Times, has benefited more than 4,000 students.

The four-stage programme develops the golfer in areas from golf skills and sports psychology to endurance development through aqua and gym training.

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HIS INSPIRATION

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– Muhd Syabil Abdul Kadir, of Youth Golf Programme, on Mardan

HIS CALLING

I want to fine-tune their game and create future champions.

– Mardan Mamat, a caddie who rose to be Singapore's No. 1 golfer

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