

CLASS ACT

BBC Breakfast presenter and avid golfer Naga Munchetty talks to Kaye Holland about her life on the fairways, with some advice for newcomers to the sport

NAGA'S 3 TOP TIPS TO GET STARTED

1 Have lessons. Nothing is more painful than not knowing why you aren't hitting the ball well.

2 Arrange to play with friends and like-minded people.

3 Accept that golf is a very frustrating game, but there will always be one sweet shot during a round that will keep you coming back for more.



When did you start playing golf and where?

My husband James and I were on holiday in South Africa six and a half years ago and seeing him playing on those beautiful courses in the sunshine made me decide to give golf a go.

On our return to the UK, James bought me a cheap set of clubs and booked me in for a course of lessons. I had lessons once a week for 15 weeks and would practise afterwards for an hour — it took three lessons just to get to a full swing. I was very diligent and precise about it all. After 15 weeks of lessons, I went out on a nine-hole course and shot 47 and was very, very upset. I expected to par every hole and that attitude hasn't left me!

My husband and I then joined Nizels Golf & Country Club in Kent, where we met some lovely people. They also showed us how great club golf is and how sociable it can be.

Did you have any preconceptions about golf?

Yes. I thought it was posh, stuffy, sexist... I had this view of golf as an old man's game and believed there would be too many rules. And I hated the clothes: chinos and polo shirts. I hadn't worn a polo shirt since school PE classes. Thankfully, the clothes have got a lot better now. Basically I just had this image of golf as being removed from reality. I thought it was elitist and, while there are some clubs that are like that, most aren't.

How did you improve your game?

Practice, practice, practice... I still have a lesson every six weeks. I think lessons are really personal. Having someone teach you the game you love is an intimate thing, so you have to trust your instructor.

Where in the world have you played?

Three months after first picking up a club, I played at Chateau des Sept Tours in France — and got a

hole-in-one. Not bad for a beginner! France is a favourite golf destination, because I love the food. After a good game of golf, you want a decent glass of wine and nosh and France is perfect for that. Aside from France, I've played in South Africa, New Zealand and Bermuda.

Who do you enjoy playing with?

I like playing with my husband, but the great thing about golf is you can play with absolutely anyone. Your handicap or age doesn't matter.

What are your five favourite courses and why?

Castle Stewart in Scotland for the rugged landscape and views. Bearwood Lakes in Berkshire because it's very peaceful, plus you have to be quite smart to plot your way round. In Bermuda, Turtle Hill is fantastic. I never thought I'd include a par-3 course in a top five, but Turtle Hill is so varied. Arabella Golf Club in South Africa also stands out, as the first place I played golf by the sea. And my home courses in Hertfordshire — you can't beat what's on your doorstep.

Do you have any tips to encourage more women to play what's seen as a male dominated sport?

Get involved! Try to join a club which has a big ladies section and don't just stick to your own clique. Meet as many people as you can (mixed golf is fantastic for this) because this is how you'll realise who you really enjoy playing with.

Which golfers do you admire most?

Laura Davies for her longevity and fighting spirit. She's one of the pioneers of the modern game and sets a great example with her charity work, too. And Liselotte Neumann. I was lucky enough to play with Liselotte at St Andrews — she has a real calmness about her when she plays.

Above: Naga Munchetty (left) with Di Dougherty and Jodie Kidd at the Pro-Am round staged prior to Wentworth's BMW PGA Championship.

Opposite: Naga Munchetty presenting *BBC Breakfast*

BIOGRAPHY

London-born Naga Munchetty, 39, presents *BBC Breakfast* and *BBC World News*. Naga studied English literature and language at Leeds University before returning to London to embark on City University's postgraduate degree in newspaper journalism. Post university, Naga launched her career as a financial journalist on the *London Evening Standard* and *The Observer* before moving into television.

A self-confessed 'obsessive golfer', Naga has a handicap of 9 and last year won *Celebrity Mastermind* with her specialist subject: The Ryder Cup, 1979 to the Present.