



A century of golf in Sint-Martens-Latem

At the beginning of the 20th century there were no real golf courses in Belgium. There were hardly twenty players. The first game was organized in 1902 between some golf players from Ghent and the 'Bruges Golf Club', a club with mostly British players.

It is said that Pierre-Paul Dobbelaere, a liberal member of the city council, introduced the game in Ghent. The golf players of Ghent first came together on a military practice field in Sint-Denijs-Westrem. The team of the players changed names in 1903, from 'Omnium Sporting' to 'Tennis en Golfclub'. In 1905 the players move to the Sint-Amandsberg race track. The number of members rises sufficiently to found an independent golf club. Since that date the club becomes known as 'Golf de Gand'.

The first champions league for golf clubs was organised in 1909. Building projects threaten the fields of the Sint-Amandsberg race track and Albert Feyerick, one of the first golf players, decides to transform his hunting pavilion 'La Garenne' in Sint-Martens-Latem into a proper golf course. Feyerick asks Geo Pannell to draw a course with 18 holes.

Works begin in 1909. When finished, the golf course is only accessible for family and forty friends of Feyerick who play golf. This group of friends consists largely of swordsmen and other industrialists in the textile industry who share Feyerick's liberal ideology. Mister Feyerick is a prominent businessman in Ghent and in 1913 he is asked to organize sport activities for the World Fair that is being held in Ghent. He ensures that his course, that is named 'les Buttes Blanches' after the sandy hills that run through it, is inaugurated in 1912, so that he can invite friends and business contacts starting from 1913.

The golf activities are ceased when the First World War breaks out. Albert Feyerick dies a few years later in February 1919. His brother Ferdinand inherits the property and founds on January 1 1920 the 'Buttes Blanches Sports Association'. When Ferdinand Feyerick passes away in September 1920 his youngest brother, Jacques, proposes the club members to become shareholders. When they agree, the Société Coopérative 'Golf Club des Buttes Blanches' is born. Georges Vander Stegen is the first president of the association. The club is granted the title 'Société Royale' (Royal Association) in 1928.

The 'Buttes Blanches' hold tight to their status of family club and prosper. During the Second World War the German occupier seizes the golf course and the club house every now and then. Just after the war president Jean Delori does everything that is in his power to bring the golf course back in order. Pierre Abbeloos, Renaud Nève de Mévergnies and Jules Swaelens are the other main instigators behind the movement to bring back the glory years.

The club becomes famous outside of Belgium. During the Fifties three International Opens are organized in Latem. Donald Swaelens, son of pro player Jules Swaelens, emerges as one of the best players of the continent. His career is abruptly halted when he dies in 1975 at the age of 39.

During the Seventies golf makes huge progress in Belgium and the club attracts numbers of new members. The club changes its name into 'Royal Latem Golf Club'. At the end of the Eighties the club has about 500 members. The club house and other facilities aren't equipped for this. Therefore, the club house is renovated thoroughly and a new 'practice' is installed.

Today the prospering club counts 1000 members. More wouldn't be possible because of the limited size of the golf course (40 ha). The club has different presidents: Georges Vander Stegen, Jean Delori, Pierre Abbeloos, Jean François Delori, Jacques Goethals, William Bostyn, Jacques Manchoulas and Paul Rappe. On March 22 2009 Francis Meert is elected as president. He succeeds Paul Rappe.