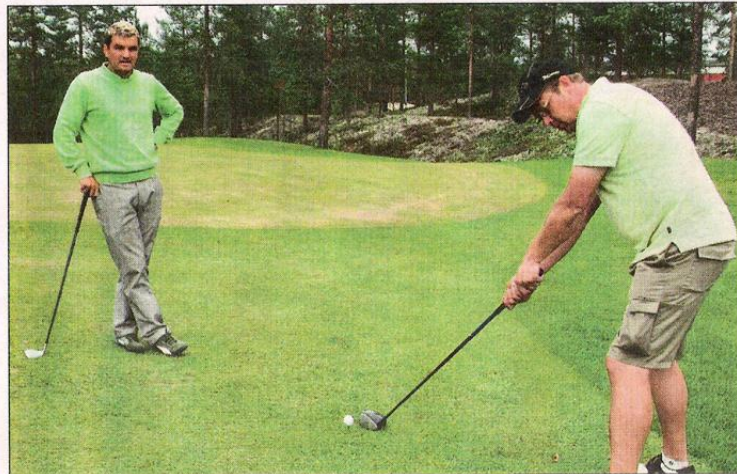


# There is something about the green

Antti Tarvainen started to play golf in April 2007. Since then he has played over 200 rounds, lost 17 kilos and acquired a unique golfing style.

MARJO HÄKKINEN



Golf teacher Tommi Linna (left) with Antti Tarvainen (right) at the Virpiniemi Golf Club, Haukipudas.

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GOLF can no longer be considered as an elitist sport. There are over 125,200 golfers in Finland. The amount has increased by 30 per cent during the last five years.

"The men came first, then the women and children little by little," SF PGA PRO golf teacher **Tommi Linna** explains. In Finland attitudes

have changed since he started to play golf in 1979. "I was bullied because of my plus-fours."

According to Linna, competition and handicap is more important to men, whereas women enjoy good company and exercising. In southern Finland the season starts in March and golf is played until December. In the north a season is half of that in the south, but in winter golf can be practiced on unique courses, such as

ice! The most famous "whites" are at the Kemijoki winter golf course in Rovaniemi.

## My way and the high way

Limousine taxi driver **Antti Tarvainen** from Oulu plays one to two rounds every day. "I get up at half past four and work until one pm. I play from half past two until eight and go to bed at around nine," says Tarvainen, who doesn't

have to go to the course alone since his wife and 9-year-old son also play golf.

Tarvainen is not your average golfer in his home course at the Virpiniemi Golf Club, as he is also "the host," the sponsor of the eighth hole. Not only is he a devoted golfer, he also has his own extraordinary golfing style. Normally a golfer plays with 14 clubs, but for Tarvainen with three million driven kilometres under his belt, the driver is the club of choice. "I always start with it."

Tarvainen also organises an annual tournament on 8 August starting at 8:08, and if he wins the tournament the first prize goes, surprisingly, to the eighth. Another specialty is that every hole is played from the white tee.

## Respect the rules

In spite of Tarvainen's original style, the internationally standardised rules and etiquette are an important part of the game.

"Make a guess," Linna says when asked if he ever feels like swearing after a bad strike. But swearing or other outbursts of feeling don't belong to golf. "That rule teaches the player to handle the

ups and downs. As they are part of golf as well as life, too," Linna explains.

The rules may vary from club to club and some clubs, for example, are stricter with clothing rules. "One girl was turned out of a course because she wore too short shorts," Linna knows. He simply advises beginners by saying: "Tidy clothes. Bikinis and swimsuits don't belong to a golf course." That is usually enough.

The allegedly snob clothing rules of golf are mild compared to the fact that as a taxi driver Tarvainen had to wear a tie for 29 years. "And the new regulation forbids jeans as of 1 August," he says.

## Pros and cons

Golf is not the most environmentally friendly sport, but it is a healthy recreational activity. "It has been measured that golfers have walked 11 kilometres and lost 2,820 calories in one round," Linna says. Tarvainen lost 11 kilos of weight during the summer of 2007 and this August he weighs 6 kilos less than he did in April.

However, playing golf is not free. "Expenses are 1,000-1,200 euros a year," Linna estimates. Tarvainen counts 1,000 euros in which he includes the lunches and refreshments at the club.

Tarvainen's lunch is light: "Tomatoes, cucumber and soup." But it's important not to eat just before the round. "Once you make that

## Golf Clubs in the metropolitan area

- Helsinki City Golf
- Paloheinä Golf
- Helsinki Golf Club
- Talin Kartano
- Suur-Helsinki Golf
- Lakisto
- Luukki

## Good to know

- There are 115 official golf courses in Finland.
- Most Finnish golf courses welcome guest players.
- When planning a visit to a course, start by calling the course's caddy master.
- Always take your handicap/membership card with you.
- Cell phones are not allowed at many courses.

mistake, you won't make it again," Linna says.

Tarvainen's handicap is now at 21.8 and the realistic aim is somewhere between 15 and 10. The hole-in-one is every golfer's dream and Tarvainen is eager to be, of course, the 8th hole-in-one of the 2-year-old Virpiniemi Golf Club. But it wouldn't put an end to his lifestyle. "Never. I will play golf for as long as I live and hopefully that will also prolong my life."