

It's in the BAG



At just 9 years old, James Bailey of Barton under Needwood has the confidence and poise of someone twice his age. He is the youngest 18-hole member of Branston Golf and Country Club and has a whole raft of achievements already in the bag.

James has spent much of his childhood in and around the golf scene, thanks to dad Phil Bailey who shares his son's passion for the game. Together they play at Branston Golf and Country Club (near Burton) and travel around the UK and European for a variety of competitions.

"I love playing with my Dad as we both get excited when I hit a good shot but I know I have to get my head down again and focus on the next one" he commented. This simple acknowledgement of how the game of golf works speaks volumes. James is really happy to do well but knows he then has to concentrate to continually improve his standard – something that can take older golfers much longer to appreciate. "Me and Dad caddy for each other which is good" explained James "and obviously I like that he buys me all the good stuff for golf" he added with a cheeky grin.

James spends a lot of time playing golf, having lessons and generally soaking up the golf club atmosphere. He is well liked by the professionals at the club who invest lots of time with him. Matt Oliver, who recently turned pro, has helped James over the years by taking him out for 18 holes when James knows Matt was meant to be practising himself! "James is a great kid with an unbelievable amount of natural talent. He loves spending time down at the driving range and is always asking me for a chipping competition!" commented Matt. "James is a great young prospect and consistently holds his own in adult competitions" he finished.

The PGA teaching professionals at the club, Iain Ross and Simon Berry speak very highly of James. "I have been working with James now for a number of years and have seen him progress into a well established player. He has a great work ethic and is always keen to practice despite any poor weather conditions, which we seem to be having quite a lot of recently! As he has become stronger, his technique has improved as well as his distance. His ability to create shots around the green and to recover in awkward situations is as good as any club golfer, if not better. James has a bright future ahead of him and will certainly be one to watch as he progresses through the ranks and into top level golf" said Iain Ross. James trains with Iain throughout the week.

Simon Berry, head golf professional for Ace Golf Academy said: "James has a natural gift for golf, and has the skill to become a top class golfer. He has an excellent manner and the temperament to succeed". James is part of the Academy and Elite classes run by Simon.

During the summer of 2009 James attended the Lee Westwood Academy at Morley Hayes in Derby. He won the 9 and under category after a gruelling 3 day clinic which covered all aspects of the game including knowledge and etiquette. The highlight for James was actually meeting Lee Westwood, his golfing hero, in person and being able to ask him direct questions. His ultimate ambition is to play against him before Lee joins the senior tour. We somehow think that might be on the cards!



First set of clubs, age 3



Happy to be a winner



James watches as hero Lee Westwood tees off

Another high spot of 2009 for James was his appearance at the British Junior Golf Tour World Final, held at the Pestana Gremacho Golf Course in Portugal. James qualified for this prestigious event after competing at the world famous Hotchkin Course at Woodhall Spa. The World Final consisted of 4 rounds of 18-hole golf where James achieved 4 under par rounds and ultimately went on to win the 9 and under category with the best net score.

James does play other sports such as football for Barton Rovers and likes to go swimming but golf clearly has his heart. Back at home, he has 2 older sisters, Abi and Paige, so at least mum Angela has some company for shopping trips as the male contingent is on the golf course so often! James commented that he keeps fit without knowing it when he is playing as he walks the miles around the course each time.

His goals for 2011 are to get his handicap down to 18 and concentrate on the Branston Majors. In addition he will be competing in lots of Opens this year, aiming to play for the Staffordshire county boys' team. He also has his heart set on qualifying for one of the world titles held in Portugal and the USA. He especially likes to try out new courses and admits to playing more cautiously if he isn't familiar with a particular course. "I'm going to play in Surrey soon - I don't know what it'll be like but I am pretty sure I'll enjoy it" he added.

"The people at Branston have been really good to me" commented James. "Iain is a great coach and everyone there really supports me and the other junior players" he finished. Another Branston professional, Will Harvey, said: "James has had the best possible start to his golfing career, with an enviable swing and mature attitude at such a young age the sky is the limit. He has all the skills in place and with a few years of practice behind him I have no doubt he will be contending for the major amateur titles."

James is truly mad about the game and hopes to become a professional player in the future. What is really endearing is that he said he'd like to be a golfer, a caddy or work in a golf shop - all in the same breath! It would appear that James is 'on course' to be a great name in golfing circles, whichever path he chooses, and certainly a name we should all look out for in a few more years.

Despite his success and obvious talent, James is a really great lad with good manners and a strong family base that keeps him well grounded. Big-headed? Absolutely not. Big ideas? Of course...



James with Lee Westwood



Proud Dad, Phil with James

Key facts:

- 2007: Started playing golf at Branston Golf & Country Club, aged 4
- 2007: James' gets his first Handicap - 56
- 2007: James played his first competition, the HSBC Wee Wonders Championship
- 2007: James joined the British Tour and competed throughout the UK
- 2008: Achieved Runner Up and Order of Merit in the Summer Tour 2008
- 2008: Qualified for the British Junior Golf Tour at Celtic Manor
- 2008: New Handicap of 36 awarded
- 2009: New Handicap of 27 achieved
- 2009: Awarded 'Most Improved Golfer' and 'Outstanding Achievement' by Branston Golf Club
- 2009: Attended Lee Westwood Academy
- 2009: Qualified for the British Junior Golf Tour World Final in Portugal - James won the Under 9s category
- 2010: James was invited to play for the Branston Junior team as first reserve
- 2010: James won 2 of 8 of the 2010 Branston Majors: the Junior Toon and Junior Baden Powell Trophies
- 2010: New Handicap of 25 (playing off the back tees so no mean feat for a 9 year old)

James' Equipment:

- US Kids Tour Series golf clubs
- US Kids Tour Series bag
- Ping Putter Scottsdales
- Srixon soft feel golf balls
- SG5 Sky Caddy
- Trolley