

Stoke by Nayland - Stage 1 European Tour School

Day 1 - Travel and practice

OK so off we go again for another exciting week on the bag. This week been honoured and Jack asked me to work for him, maybe at a reduced rate. I had a few things to do for my mum this morning, she's not in best of health so we didn't leave till 10.30am. 4 hours in a car with Jack, a long time to catch up with each other. To be fair the journey was good and went quite quick as we chatted nicely to each other, always a bonus. We were heading for Stoke by Nayland Golf Club, in between Ipswich and Colchester.

We arrive at the club about 2pm and Jack goes to register while I stretch my old legs. Bonus this week is yardage charts are free, now that's nice. Hope they are up to scratch. We meet Bradley Moore on the first tee and get going. Nice to meet Brad again especially after Luton so lots to chat about. Bradley had just flown in from France, been on holiday with his girlfriend, who walked round with us. She's very quiet didn't say a word, ah well never mind.

Weather is great today and course seems quite playable, greens are OK should get better as week progresses. Front nine easier than the back nine by far, some good chances on the front but back nine needs some good golf, long par fours and some really good par 3s. Plan should be to get through front nine few under and consolidate on the back. Jack has his tee time through by text and we off tenth at 8.40am. Solid start is required 10,11,12,13 all good holes and need care. We finish the PR (practice round) and say our goodbyes to Brad and Torrey, straight to car to go find hotel.

It's 20mins away by sat nav. On our route we go passed Colchester football stadium. One of Jack's friends Aaron Collins plays for Colchester so I message his dad to see if they playing this week, we may go watch him. Unfortunately they are away so I enquire if he would like dinner one evening and we would go meet him. We find the hotel, not bad a place bit better than I am used to but Jack booked it so I am in now. Quick check in and down for food, we have got early start so no messing about. Gammon for me and 2 Heineken, Jack has fish. Whilst having dinner, I get a message from George Grimes. Some of you will remember George, he was a member at Llanwern and Green keeper at Celtic. He's an Essex lad and

works not far from this place. I like George he was a good lad at Llanwern and he dated Holly from the pro shop when Steve Price had it. They have 2 kids and a dog now and he said he would come and watch Jack tomorrow. Maybe I can persuade him out for a beer in the week. Well we ate our dinner, Jack retires to bed and I have a night cap and write this blog. All is good so let's hope for a great week.

Stoke by Nayland - Tournament day 1

Early start 5.30am alarm then breakfast at 6.30am. Yoghurt, toast, scrambled egg and beans, off we go to course and arrive at 7.25am perfect. Straight to range for Jack's warm up. Bit nippy this morning and very windy. The wind is pretty constant but has gusts of up to 40mph that could cause some issues. After range warm we head to putting green, but I have to call into the onsite shop for some snacks for the course. Well what a bonus, they sell Haribo sweets, the full range in large packets. As you all know I am such an athlete I take my on course nutrition very seriously so I bought 2 large packs of sweets, and 2 chocolate bars for me, I got Jack some bananas on the tee. Hahaha only joking Jack shared some of my sweets, typical. He does like bananas though and as they are free at pretty much every event I suppose the players get used to them. I will say I did pick up an apple, bloody massive one, like a cooking apple and it was juicy.

We are ready to go bang on our tee time 8.40am but the 10th is a pretty special hole, water right all the way to green and a minimum 200 yard carry to fairway from this back tee. The wind is also straight into the face. Yesterday it was 2 iron, 7 iron but today I was advising 3 wood, but we ended up hitting driver just to be sure and Jack was comfortable hitting that to take all trouble out of play. Just as we were teeing off we had a spectator arrive, it was George Grimes, bless him, he came to watch. Haven't seen George for a few years so that was great. Back to the golf, Jack was a little nervous on the tee but so he should be, who wouldn't be and who would want this as a first shot of the day. Anyway he put his safe swing on it and it was fine, a little left but fine. We had a yank and a kiwi for company today, Chase and Campbell, respectively, they both got away OK but Campbell had to chip out sideways for his second shot. We had 181 yards left to flag for our approach. Wind was gusting off the left and slightly helping, we agreed on 7 iron as long of flag was not great and

that would easily clear water. He hit a beautiful shot right at the flag but it went about 25ft passed the flag just in the fringe. Honestly my first thought was "aw don't be one of those days" because it was a real slippery chip and keeping it to 10 feet was not a bad shot. Jack wanted to putt it but I just felt the soft chip would be better, he played that and it fell in the hole perfect. Great start kid.

11 tough par 3, 205 yards uphill into wind, a lovely controlled 4 iron to 30 feet was tidy and a solid par. Again solid par on 12 and a lovely start. The 13th is 455 Yard par 4, wind off the right slightly helping, Jack hit his tee shot, picked up his tee walked to me and said "see ya", well yes bye bye ball we had 60 yards left. Nice shot son, shame we had 20 yards left for his 3rd shot but it was a nice drive. He made par and kept his momentum and solid 2 putt birdie on 14 and another 2 putt birdie on 16 had us at 3 under and cruising nicely. Par 17, a tricky hole with blind tee shot was good but 18 we came a little unstuck. Wind was gusting and Jack caught a gust on his tee shot, his 7 iron went 20 yards long. Not very nice, down slope to a tight pin with green sloping away. Only blessing it was back into wind. He wanted to pitch it on the fringe but the grass was against and quite long, he couldn't risk leaving it short. Better to fly it onto the green and if it goes ten feet passed that's better. He played a lovely chip to 4 feet and holed for par, great save kid. George then left us he had to go back to work, so we carry on and after a tidy lay up from the tee on 1st we had 100 yards to front right flag, better to be bold here, we notice both playing partners come up little short so we change bat to 50 degree wedge, he hit lovely shot right over flag. As it's a raised green we can't see anything but suddenly there is a shout from a bloke in a car driving out and he is slapping the side of his car, it's George leaving and he has seen Jack's ball pitch ten feet passed the flag and spin back.

Stoke by Nayland 3 - Tournament day 2

Reasonable wake up and breakfast today and arrive at course for 8.30am, get Jack out to warm up and ready to go for 9.30am, all good so far. Again it's bloody windy today and gusty, clubbing and judging the wind is going to be difficult. Jack looks good and feels good, but strangely after a slightly long second shot to the opening hole (20 feet passed flag just

on fringe) he seemed very angry, it was a good shot but wind just hit it a little. He nearly holed his chip and a tap in par. That should settle him!!!! A slight pull tee shot on 2 made us layup and his third shot was decent just didn't fly into the wind and caught the trap. Again a poor angry reaction, asking for food and he seemed agitated. To be fair he played a brilliant bunker shot that nearly went in and again a tap in par. Lovely tee shot on 3 to 12 feet but just missed the putt. 4 is a tough par four but Jack flushed his tee shot just catching the right semi rough, he didn't hit a great 5 iron but the miss was good, anywhere just right was fine. Again he almost holed the chip and another tap in par. All is good. A fantastic 350 yard tee shot on 5 left us a nice 7 iron for second to this tricky par 5. Easy birdie and we under par, cool. Again lovely tee shot at 6 and a decent wedge left Jack 15 feet for birdie which he just missed, no worries. Now 7 is a 170 par 3 uphill but downwind. We agreed on 9 iron to middle of green. I can't say he went for flag or he pushed it but his shot started too straight and drifted on the wind, kicked off the bank and finished in thick rough. His reaction is what surprised me the most, total frustration and anger. I know Jack may read this so all I will say as his caddy is this. The result on 7 and 8 were purely down to him and his lack of controlling his emotions. He will argue differently and probably say it due to me being on the bag, he says he doesn't react like that when he's on his own. Probably correct, but I can assure you I have seen enough temperamental golfers to know when the plot has been lost. A 3 putt double and a 3 putt triple on 7 and 8 totally f***ed his momentum and concentration. The only good thing was the walk from 8 Green to 9 tee is about 500 yards. In that time he managed to somehow calm himself and regather. I had no contribution to that, I know when to shut my mouth. As much as I despair at what I see him do sometimes I must also credit the lad with some balls. The 9th is a bloody hard par 3, 190 yards downhill into a howling gale. The ball is at height straight from the tee and controlling the flight is very difficult. To Jack's credit he calmed himself enough to pure a five iron to 20 feet and hole the putt for a 2. Big gohonas son.

From then to 15 he played great, hit some good tee shots, controlled his flight and could easily have made a few birdies, but putting in the wind is tricky as we all know. 15 is a short par 4 but lay up only. Into wind from left, we hit 4 iron all week but today flag is back left and I agree it's better to get closer to the green to make a better chance at birdie. So we go with 2 iron from tee. Poor, poor, poor shot low left and could be OOB. We hit provisional.

We find first ball no problem, clear swing and luckily in play. Only issues are the conifers on the line and a tight lie. Now I am going to stick my neck on the line here and say this.

Anyone who played decent golf in the 80s and 90s always thought they could hit the "Seve shot", if you had any talent in your hands you could try the "Seve shot" it may not always come off but you thought you could hit it. This is where I suffer a little as a caddie. I won't lie, I see these shots, modern players don't. They don't shape it like we used to, they don't practice it. To me, hand on heart, it all starts in the head. When Jack found his ball, in the clear, in play, and with a full clear swing, my first thought was, watch this lads this will be special. That was Seve. Yes it was a tricky shot, yes it was risky but from 135 yards wind off the left a high cut 8 or 9 iron was always going to get him close.

So like I said, on first tee at PlayGolf and trying to not look a fool. I peg up my driver, I see the range on the left and another hole running parallel to me on the right with people playing. As I take my stance I am preparing for the fore shout, either right or left but it's coming. I swing, keep my head down and stick to the basics. Whack it's off, I glance up and bugger me, it went straight and long too. Finishing just short of the green. "good swing fella" said the pro, I touched my cap as a pro does and casually strolled off the tee. Lucky f***er crunch!!!!!! The course was fun but not as good as the one in Luton. I played nine holes and wandered in, it was far too windy and I was knackered. I asked Jack to pick me up at 7.15pm and that was perfect as I just finished my Stella as he pulled up. We went straight for food then back to hotel. I won't discuss our conversation over dinner but you can all feel free to ask me how my son, bless him, believes that hitting every green, every time he plays golf is possible. "Discuss".

We then go back to hotel, as we approach there is a new sign at the entrance. Security please stop for check. Hello what's happening here, who is in our hotel. It turns out the National Police Fishing Championships are being held local and they are all staying at our hotel. The security is because all the competitors have 1000s of pounds worth of kit in their vehicles. Police fishomania if you like!!! Well that was enough for me to hit the sack. So goodnight till tomorrow.

Stoke by Nayland 4 - Tournament day 3

Up at 7 and meet Jack in car park at 8am. We are having breakfast in the club today and poached egg on toast was the choice. It's windy again but not quite as bad as yesterday. A good warm up and off to the first we go. Today we playing with English lads, Sam and Lewis. Both had caddies so a few people to talk to today, when Jack storms off and leaves me. Anyway off we start, Jack pulled his 4 iron a little just in left rough, only 100 yards left but rough is quite thick and turned his club left a little. It's OK and a decent chip to 3 foot which he holed settled him down I think. He hit decent drive on 2 and we had 240 plus to go, a good 3 wood was required but he just leaked it a little right. It bounced twice then looked like it disappeared into a gorse bush. It did but just popped out the other side, luckily he could just get a club on it and nudge it just on the green fringe. He made par, another par on 3rd and a 2 putt par on the tough fourth was a solid start. A good 2 putt birdie on 5 had Jack at - 1 and relaxing nicely.

Sam had started well and was - 2 at this point but Lewis was +2 after 5. Jack missed 9 foot birdie putt on 6 but made a good par save on 7 from 4 feet. Another chip and putt par on 8 and we still - 1. A bogey followed on nine after a poor tee shot in the greenside bunker left a very tricky up and down. Back to level par and to be honest his golf was a little scruffy on the front nine so not a bad result. A 12 foot birdie putt on 10 slipped by but a fantastic chip on 11 left him a tap in par. It was a brilliant chip as well, from the rough, downhill, downwind, he had to land it in the rough and hope it killed the speed and trickled down to the flag. That's exactly what it did and it should have gone in, touch of class. Another chip and putt par on 12 after driving it in the fairway bunker was a good effort. 13 gave Jack a birdie after a massive 400 yard drive, a fair pitch and a good putt. 14 was a par but he missed from 4ft for birdie. 15 another par but missed from 8ft for birdie. 16 was a 2 putt birdie which helped keep Jack calm. Another chip and putt par on 17 was followed by a missed 8ft birdie putt on the last. The result of all this was a - 2 round of 69. A fair reflection on his round, yes he missed a few birdie chances but also made some very good par saves. He drove the ball very well but his irons lacked accuracy. He kept his cool and today's score will not sending him backwards.

Stoke by Nayland 5 - Final round

So today is the final round, make or break. By about 2pm we will know if Jack has done enough to get through or will it be a wait for 12 months to try again. £1750 entry fee it is for this stage and if you finish outside the top 16 that's it for another year. I suppose it's quite cruel but then professional sport is cruel at times.

So we check out of hotel, head for course, the atmosphere in the car is not as relaxed as it was for first few days, bit more traffic on the road made us a little slower, a lot of glancing at the clock, fidgeting etc. It's going to be a tense day I think. So this is the situation we are in. Jack is currently tied 4th at 4 under par. The top 16 qualify and currently 16th place is 1 over par. Basically it's not guaranteed to qualify in the windy conditions it's easy to shoot 5 or 6 over today. The leader is 19 under with an 8 under and 6 under behind him. I think best mental approach is to chase them rather than think of what's behind and the end goal. So warm up goes OK which is nice after Jack's last night practice session. Our playing partners today are Miles and Brant. Miles is English and lives down the road, so has some local support and Brant is American, just flown in to play this week. Two nice fellas and decent players. A solid tee shot from the first was followed by a slightly nervy approach to 30feet. A three putt would be the worst of starts, three putting is just awful as we know. But to be fair to Jack he holed a lovely tricky 4 foot putt for par which in years gone by he would have missed, but maybe just maybe he is maturing a little. The par save was crucial because it set up a perfect 244 yard 3 iron the par 5 second hole to 15 feet. If he had 3 putted the first he would not have hit that 3 iron to the second, I can promise you that. But he did hit the 3 iron and shaved the hole for Eagle.

So talking of 3 putting here one comes at the par 3 third, but it was a little quicker than Jack thought so back to level par and 4 under for the tournament. Par on 4 but he missed good chances on 5 and 6 from inside 8 feet for birdies. 7 is Jack's favourite holes this week a 177 yard par 3 and after a weak tee shot we find ourselves in thick rough with not much of a swing, a four would be good but when Jack took a swipe and I didn't see the ball move I was thinking 5 would be good!!!!!!! A 5 was the result, the second double bogey Jack has made on this hole this week. Now the last time Jack made double, he followed it with a triple on

day 2. Let's hope that's not the case because we are back to 3 under for the event and a triple now would be very very damaging.

The course is playing very tricky in the wind and scores I think will go up in my opinion. 8 is a tough tee shot in this wind and Jack has not played this hole well. With either iron or driver from the tee we haven't found the fairway. So when he said to me he was more comfortable with the driver I honestly felt why not he can't do any worse than he has all week and he had more chance of keeping the ball in play with the driver. He seemed a lot calmer after the double than last time so I was not so anxious when he teed up his ball. He then produced probably his best drive of the week, not for distance or shape or flight, just because it was a very tough tee shot and his control of the ball and his emotions was excellent. The drive left 80 yards to flag and he pitched it to 4 feet and holed the putt for birdie. Great bounce back kid!!!! OK a lot happier now and nice and relaxed. 9 was a 2 putt par from 20 feet, 10 a 2 putt par from 30 feet, tough holes out of the way. 11 was quite simply funny, scary and lucky all in one hole. The 3 lads all hit very good tee shots, Brant, 25 feet, Jack 18 feet, Miles 10 feet. Brant's putt got to the hole, gust of wind took it just inside Miles' ball. Holy shit, it's almost unplayable. I was watching the referee stood about 50 yards away, he was keeping a very close eye on this green as the wind was getting very very strong and players were starting to worry. Jack was now to putt but he hit his putt about 4 feet further left than he was before Brant putted, his ball finished 8 inches above the hole, as Jack began to walk to ball a gust of wind hit it and blew it in the hole. All legal as he has 10 seconds to play it or mark it and he was way inside that. Bloody bonus I can tell you but worryingly if it had missed the hole it was going ten feet passed. Both the others made 3s and a lot of relief was shown to get off that green. So we now back to 4 under for the tournament and level for the day.

A lot more relaxed, the goal of catching leader has probably gone but let's see how we can push on and you never know. Pars followed on 12 and 13, even though Jack hit the worst wedge shot I have seen for a long time on 13, he needs to sharpen this part of his game, but they were still pars. A beautifully struck 3 iron on par 5 14th set up a simple birdie. This seemed to prove the turning point for Jack, he thought the 3 iron on 14 was his first decent swing of the day and 15, 16, 17 and 18 were made to look very easy. Two putt par on 15, two putt birdie on 16, missed from 8 feet for birdie on 17 and 18. A very solid round of 69, 2

under was the final score and 6 under for the tournament. He finished third with the lowest score of the day in round 1 and round 4, not bad for a player who wasn't happy with his swing this week. He only finished 2 behind the winner as well, so he did have a chance in the end.

So he pops in scorers' office and I go out his clubs away and get ready to change and have a beer. Oh but no what's this, Jack running to the car, demanding we leave straight away as he has to get back to change for hoodies 30th party. "Where's my beer?" no time for that let's get on the road. FFS the things you do for your kids. So I get in the car and off we go for the 5 hour journey home, we did hit a lot of traffic. We arrive home and we are greeted by young Lewis Brown, he is dressing up with Jack for the party so they are like 2 bottles of pop. I on the other hand am cream crackered, but I have to prepare for the Club Championship final tomorrow. Looking forward to 36 holes of competitive golf after this week, oh and I am playing a county match on Sunday as well. So a 72 hole weekend, have that legs, see how we feel Monday morning. So that's it people another week done and a pretty successful one. Speak soon all!