

King David Country Club – travails and memories

[Lifestyle/Community \(from the South African Jewish Report January 2015\)](#)

(See particularly the memories of Colin Thompson, a caddy at **King David Country Club**)



Cape Town's Jewish golf club fights for its life

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For the past 60 years the Jews of Cape Town have enjoyed the fairlawns of “KD” (as they fondly refer to it). Located not too far from Cape Town International Airport, King David, established in 1956 to cater to the large Jewish community living in the Parow/Bellville area who were not really welcome anywhere else, became a hub, hosting social events, theatre productions and other sports like bowls and tennis.

But as the Cape Jewish community dwindled and other clubs opened up, KD started losing members and revenues. Golfers were also concerned about the location as it was not a safe area. It became evident that the club needed to find some solutions.

A proposal was put forward last year to sell King David's land and merge KD with the more waspy, Wynberg-based Royal Cape Golf Club. Club members estimate that the land could sell for somewhere between R200 million and R300 million. King David's members would move over to Royal Cape and King David would be required to pay Royal Cape a “dowry” of R56 million to merge.

While Royal Cape was amenable to the terms, there was a lot of dissension and heated debate among KD members and the proposal was voted down. According to members involved in the discussions, there was some dissatisfaction by a group about the way the merger talks had been conducted. Those not in favour also felt that R56 million was a hefty price tag and a decision was taken to look at alternative options.

Those in favour of the merger said they would explore the possibility of joining Royal Cape at a reduced price of R40m, but with the stipulation that Royal Cape would take on all the King David staff for a minimum two-year period or make generous redundancy payments to those who elected not to come across. In addition, all KD members who transferred to Royal Cape would have two years free membership.

This group felt the sale of the land would bring vast amounts of money into the Jewish community once the dowry had been paid. This money could be allocated to other needy areas instead of trying to maintain a money losing entity like KD.

The “stay at home group” who did not want to wind up the club, undertook to try to raise the money elsewhere. They looked at the option of asking for significant sums from the members and they

also talked to a well-known philanthropist who was considering the option of giving the club a R35 million loan. With these funds, the club could pay back Bidvest Bank the R11 million they had borrowed, they could use another third to fix up the club and fairlawns and the final third would be kept as capital. Members also felt funds would be needed to help beef up security.

Members agreed that the “stay-at-homers” had till January 21 to try and raise the money. The date came and went and despite the stay-at-homers’ best efforts to get the funds, the committee has now called time.

Members are expecting to hear in the next week or two about the chances of still putting an agreeable deal together with Royal Cape. The proposed new name would be the Royal Cape and King David Golf Club. In late February there will be a special general meeting to vote in favour or not.

The last option and probably the least popular, particularly for golfers who have played so happily together for all these years, is to just wind up the club

2 Comments

jack shnaier

January 28, 2015 at 9:01 pm

‘I am not a member of any golf club, but a member of a shul. Many shuls in the countryside, towns and cities faced the same dilemma to close down or not. Circumstances forced the members to close & sell. I say to all members of the KD golf club, face reality, sell the land, take enough money to join another club for at least 10 years & donate the profit to Jewish and non Jewish institutions’

Colin Thompson

January 1, 2016 at 1:13 pm

‘I’ve been to “KD” yesterday (Thurs. 31st.) to see for myself, whether it was a hoax or not, that my beloved King David Country Club is closing even though I have seen articles in news media about the battles to keep the “Golf Ship” afloat.

But when I spoke to some guys (fairly new at the club) they could not believe when I spoke of the clubhouse that was at the current ninth green. Then I eventually met up with Noel Maart and we could go back to the 1960’s.

A bit of history from my experience as a caddie at KD.

My uncle (known as ICE) managed the halfway house. During the school holidays in October 1964, he asked me to accompany him to KD, and maybe earn some cash, which I accepted and the following Saturday I got my first “bag”. I caddied for eighteen holes and was paid 45 cents plus 5 cents for halfway. As a caddie you were not allowed near the halfway or clubhouse, you had to wait until your “boss” finished his refreshments and he would bring whatever you ordered to the next tee-off nine.

After caddying for two years, (BOETA LOEKIE) Lucas, the locker-room controller asked me to help out in the bar to assist Mr. Raja. He warned me that Raja was a very difficult man to please. But I

persevered. On Saturday afternoons, when the club members would play, I load the bakkie and was driven to the sixth green to sell cooldrinks to the "bosses" and caddies. The tips were quite nice as well. At the sixth tee I remember we had a push-button tap but the water could never beat an ice cold cooldrink.

Whilst working in the bar, a gentleman by the name of Mr Geoff Chiat, asked me to caddy for him and leave the bar as he would double my fee. I accepted, but Mr. Raja wasn't very pleased. And the following Saturday I became the caddy for Mr. Chait.

I caddied for amongst others, (when Mr GEOFF CHAIT was not playing) Mr BLOM, Mr W BEKKER, Mr Andy BARRON, Mr JOE BUIRSKI, Mr RAY FRANCKEL, Dr MARCUS, Mr FLAX, Mr. 'course management' SONNY KOSVINER, amongst many others.

Mr Kosviner really loved the golf course. I remember when I caddied for him, he would remind me to fill my sandbag to the brim so that I could fill up all the divots he would come across on every hole. He would stop and pull-out weeds on the fairway and would tell me to throw it deep in the bushes, at no extra cost to my caddy fee. But it taught me a valuable lesson in course management which I put into practice when I started playing golf at age 23 and I would fill any unfilled divot left by undisciplined golfers/ringers).

But what I clearly remember about Mr. Kosviner, was whilst caddying for him we were so caught up in the divots and weeds that he missed playing his third shot at the par five eighth hole and we were already at the green, when his ball was about forty metres back. We all had quite a laugh, but as the caddy, I came the worst off. (A nice tongue-lashing in private.)

Let me speak about Mr. RIETSTEIN. What a character, what a strict disciplinarian, a no-nonsense man. We would never challenge him, his word was yes and amen. Lots of respect for him. I remember him telling me to put a few spades of coal in the boiler and that Lucas will make sure I will caddy that same day.

We enjoyed caddy competitions, where we would borrow clubs and the "big guys" like Mr Hartszenberg (caddy master/pro shop assistant) Noel Maart, Whitey Dirks, "Mamba" would put us to shame.

I remember scouting a few Saturdays for Clive Swersky, whilst his dad, ABE SWERSKY was playing. Quite a character that Clive 'Boy' but very down to earth, he respected all the caddies. His dad had a special club in his bag, not to hit the ball, but just for swinging purposes, as it makes a "click" sound when he followed through his swing. Then on a Sunday, there was the "Big Four". I speak under correction, but it could be, Mr Theo Spiro, Mr Joe Joffe, Mr Stan Christie, Mr Solly Berger and quite a few others on different Sundays.

The guy who also assisted in the office and the kitchen staff was Brian. He was on the ball. Whilst playing at KD later in life I also met the barman named Stephen. So sad to hear of his passing away. I follow the death column in the Cape Times regularly and always come across the passing of many Jewish Businessmen who were connected to KD.

REST IN PEACE DEAR FRIENDS, WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS, GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT. Why support one might ask? because apart from caddying, you could tell them about your hardships at home and they would open their hearts, and wallets as a show of solidarity and understanding.

Lastly, to my "Boss" Mr Geoff Chiat, hope you are in good health, and to Mr Stan Boskin, you tried your best sir, because I look at the bigger picture unlike some small-minded people who have no knowledge of golf course management.

IF THERE ARE ANY GOLF CLUBS OR GOLF BALLS LYING AROUND, DON'T HESITATE TO KEEP ME POSTED AS I PLAY WITH OLD STEEL SHAFT CLUBS. I'll be a pensioner soon and can't afford the basic golf equipment like gloves, caps and even the shoes are tattered (size nine). Bless you all for a Prosperous New Year

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