

About Jarmos way

By Tomas Hagfeldt



69 shots is a good score at the golf course. 69 shots was a considerably less great score at McDonald's miniature golf course at Fridhemsplan in Stockholm one evening in the summer of 1977. The golf course was in the basement. You had to take the escalators.

Jarmo Sandelin and his cousin had made their way there after a visit to the amusement park.

A great adventure for two small boys. First the subway from the suburb Rinkeby, then the bus to the amusement park at Djurgården, and then back to Rinkeby again. But first they had to stop at McDonald's for a crappy game of miniature golf.

"69 shots...I could not believe I did so bad," Jarmo recalls.

It was inevitable that his mother boxed his ears for being late, but it was his bad score that probably hurt the most.

Jarmo went back the next day to get revenge. He returned again and again and again that autumn and winter. Tantogårdens Miniature Golf Club discovered the stubborn boy practicing for hours without end. His mother once even made the police look for her missing son.

The training at Tantogården in the south of Stockholm continued. Jarmo was obsessed. He practiced and competed, learned to win and to lose. He took the train to Södermalm, but late at night his coaches, concerned for his safety, would drive him home.

The peak was the trials for the Junior Nordic Championships in Askim in Gothenburg. Jarmo had to change his citizenship to participate, from Finnish to Swedish.

"We won the team competition, and in the individual competition I believe I finished in third place" says Jarmo. "It was a fantastic experience." He was then only 13 years of age.

At 14 he went to the driving range at Alec's Golf in Ulriksdal. His father had recently passed away – it felt good to try something new. Some friends played golf and Jarmo wanted to know what it felt like to shoot the ball longer.

”The exact same thing happened as in McDonald’s. At first I was really bad. I saw the others at the driving range and thought that I ought to be as good as them, but... Damn, I was lousy. After five buckets I had blisters in my hands but I hadn’t improved much – so I had to return the next day.”

And the next, and the next.

During winter he continued indoors in the Tumba Tent. In a cozy corner Jarmo and his new friends watched golf tournaments on TV – he tried to copy his idol Tom Watson.

Jarmo’s golf career really took off at The Stockholm Golf Club. Since 1995 he has been on the European Tour. He has won five tour titles and he has played the Ryder Cup – the greatest Golf party you can experience.

Without Jarmo’s unique drive and endurance this story would have been a different one.

The story about The Jarmo Foundation is partly about this very thing: the single individual’s potential for development – from 69 shots in miniature golf to 69 shots at the golf course, sort of...

This quote from Jarmo kind of sums it up: ”For those with an inner drive to fight hard to reach their full potential, regardless of what that might be, there is always a way to success. But there are also always exceptions, where society and private organizations have to step in to aid with help and support.”

And this: ”Today I would never allow my kids to travel on the subway alone. It’s much harder, much rougher out there now. Sweden in the seventies was so nice and cozy in a way.”

And that’s why help is needed.

I remember a day with Jarmo in 1999 – when Ryder Cup was in the focus of attention. We spoke about this subject: about playing marbles in Rinkeby, miniature golf and throwing rose hips.

”It was better back then. Now they fight with knives and shit. Return to the rose hips!” Jarmo says.

"If I hadn't played miniature golf, I would probably have spent my time at the youth club, throwing stones at people."

We discussed society's responsibility for motivating young people the right way, and what the right kind of support would mean to teenagers with a talent they wish to develop further.

"Young people don't wish to sit at home, staring at the ceiling."

When we meet today, my first question is: Why do you, Jarmo Sandelin, want to do this?

"When you've played as long as I have done on the PGA European Tour and with my background...it feels natural. I didn't have much when I started out. I got used to having to fight to get clubs and balls and to go to competitions and camps. I think about how I started. It's easy being empathic with those who are in the same position as I was about 30 years ago.

And this is possible thanks to the contacts you have made during your years on the PGA Tour?

"I've met people in the golf world who are now my friends. They are all people that have worked hard to be successful. Now I have the possibility to raise money for the fund. I can then distribute money to various causes."

"How much can the fund contribute with?"

"That's impossible to say at this moment. The important thing is to participate in one way or another and that I find the right people to help."

Jarmo wants to keep his two jobs separate. One is golf playing, just as important as before, and the foundation is the other. He wants to give them both 100 percent of his attention.

In the summer of 2007, the first contribution was made for the foundation. Jarmo Foundation Pro Am was played at International Golf Club Arlanda and was made into a party still talked about.

Friends from the PGA European Tour and guests from all over the world were there and everyone went by boat to a party tent at a pier by Nacka Strand in the archipelago – all dressed in white.

The preceding auction in Stockholm gave The Jarmo Foundation an initial capital. Shortly after seven organizations were given contributions to the total amount of 300 000 SEK.

”Supporting a guy like Anton Abele when he starts Stoppa gatuvåldet, (Stop Street Violence), feels like the right thing to do. A local branch in Tyresö of the organization Smart were struggling financially. They work to keep teenagers away from alcohol and drugs. It felt right to support them so they could keep going”, Jarmo says.

The aim is to give similar help to other organizations and individuals.

”It’s a question of finding people – the right people. Like I said: young girls and boys with a strong drive to succeed in something.”

Young people not content with staring at the ceiling.