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Golf icon Gary Placer visits Cuba

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A little after 2pm on Friday, October 14, it seemed like the whole world was about to end in the beach resort of Varadero, located northeast of the city of Matanzas. Basically, a torrential downpour had soaked the white sands of the beautiful beach, to such an extent that we thought we'd never see the sun again that day.

However, within half an hour the very last vestiges of the storm had disappeared, and South Africa's Gary Player (November 1, 1935) – one of the best golfers of all time, visiting Cuba to participate in the Hispanic Day Tournament, organized by the Spanish Embassy on the island - emerged from the Xanadu Mansion, known for decades as Dupont House, dressed in his customary all-black attire.

The renowned and experienced golfer, with over 160 victories in his professional career, offered a clinic at Varadero's Golf Club, where Australia's Greg Norman (world number one for over 300 weeks during his career) had been just a week earlier, as a guest to the eighth edition of the Cuba Golf Grand Tournament.

Player spoke with several Caribbean, Spanish and Latin American players at the facility, all of whom enjoyed the opportunity to receive advice from a man who continues to be in excellent form, above all due to a strict diet and training regime.

“Golf is like dancing, it’s about fluidity, movement, balance, keen observation. What’s more, you can play golf throughout your life, unlike other sports, which once you reach 30 your performance starts to decline. I, for example, won a tournament at 63,” stated Gary during a lengthy conversation on the Club’s training course, which is visited by over 30,000 tourists ever year.

“It’s a great site, I have noticed great love from the Cubans, we have received a warm welcome ever since we arrived. Many players that have been here at other times had told me that Cuba is a beautiful country, but I wanted to see it with my own eyes,” noted Player speaking exclusively with **Granma International**.

“We’re really excited to be here, partake in tourist activities and, of course, play golf, above all with the kids and young people,” commented the South African, who highlighted the importance of starting to play the sport from an early age.

During our conversation, Gary Player, a member of the Golf Hall of Fame since 1974, recognized that despite Cuba’s lack of experience in the discipline, the country has the potential to develop golf in the medium and long term.

“There’s no doubt that golf is an expensive sport, but it’s opening up more and more to the entire public. There are over 80 million golfers on the planet, and now its inclusion in the Olympic Games, has made a very positive difference for lovers of the sport.

“Golf attracts tourism, which will increase with the development of the sport. This is the vision that Cuba could have, because it has exquisite natural riches, great beauty, that is to say, enormous potential to attract more travelers and more money. When it’s cold in Russia, and it doesn’t stop raining in London, you (Cubans) have an amazing climate,” stated Player.

Meanwhile, the experienced 81 year-old sportsman described golf as an ideal tourism modality, given that the sport is played by many wealthy people, who like to book golfing holidays.

“Having a course is another way of attracting tourism, we know that Cuba has other strategies and other charms on its stunning beaches, but golf could be more fruitful. For example, lots of companies would be willing to invest to build courses in the country.

“There wasn’t much development in South Africa, but lots of people put in money to build courses and this generated jobs, as well as the subsequent growth of the sport. We’ve seen the same thing happen recently in Honduras, and we also believe that it will be possible in Cuba,” stated the golfer.

During the clinic, Gary Player also noted that South African leader Nelson

Mandela was one of the gentlest men he had ever met, describing his efforts and the support he provided to Cuba as incredible.

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