

Slum golf: the Sport that Stormed the Streets of Mumbai - 11 February, 2019

Anil Mane grew up in a slum in Mumbai. His home – a single room – was just over the wall from the members-only Bombay Presidency Golf Club. The club has 100 acres of land in a city where the average population density is 31,700 people per square kilometre.

*Where did Mane grow up?
Where did he live near to?
How big is the golf club?
What is the population density of Mumbai?*

When Mane was just 14, he left school to become a caddy at the golf course. But it wasn't until 3 years later, when he was 17, that he first tried golf. A club member gave him a golf club and told him to have a go. That moment changed his life, he says: he realized golf was his chance of a better life.

*What did Mane do when he was 14?
How old was he when he first tried golf?
How did he come to play golf?*

There was only one problem: the club didn't allow caddies to play on the course. Mane earned his living in a world that wouldn't allow him to participate. Every night, he would leave the exclusive club and go back to his single room and poverty.

*What problem did Mane have?
What did he have to do at the end of every day?*

'Slum golf' is golf played in the narrow streets of the slum. The obstacles include houses, walls, drains, construction debris, parked vehicles, sleeping dogs, rubbish dumps, cows and holes in the road. They play with cheap plastic ping pong balls and home-made clubs.

*Where is slum golf played?
What are some of the obstacles they use?
What type of balls do they play with?
Who makes their golf clubs?*

The course starts outside Mane's friend Suresh Mehboobani's house. Like Mane, Mehboobani was a caddy. "Slum golf is what we do for fun," Mehboobani says. The club now allows caddies to use the club on Mondays, when it is closed to members, but Mehboobani says they still play slum golf "for fun, especially during the monsoon months."

*What do Mane and Mehboobani have in common?
When can the caddies play at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club?
Do they still play slum golf? If so why and when?*

When the German golfer Norman Dick saw a YouTube video of Mane and his friends playing

slum golf, he saw a younger, more energetic kind of golf. Normally, golf is played by middle-aged businesspeople. He decided to invite the slum golfers to Paris for the World Urban Golf Cup.

*Where did Norman Dick see a video of Mane and his friends?
What did Dick decide to do?*

“In Europe, we have a wonderful community of urban golfers who meet at tournaments that happen on the streets of European cities,” Dick says. “Everybody who wants to play can play. Even if you don’t have the money, we find a way.” He contacted Mane, Mehboobani and four other slum golfers and invited them to Paris to represent India. The European teams in the tournament helped to pay for the Indian team’s flights, visas and hotel.

The tournament was in September, 2018. 10 national teams played, and the Indians came fifth. They were pleased with the result, but they enjoyed the experience even more. They saw a life that was different from their everyday reality in Mumbai. “What I loved best about Paris is that we felt free. The streets were clean, and we could play golf on the streets without a care,” Mehboobani says.

Mane became a professional in 2010 and now teaches at the golf club. Most of his friends still caddy there. On a good day, they can earn 1,000 rupees (£11), tips included. They dream of becoming professional golfers like Mane, and many professional players in India are former caddies. But professional tournaments are expensive to enter. They often cost 50,000 rupees (£550) or more. Some lucky players find business sponsors, but the others must use money from generous club members.

Training, too, is expensive and time-consuming. “You need to hit at least 1,000 balls a day as part of your training to become professional,” says Mehboobani. He says it is a luxury most cannot afford. Until they can, they play slum golf. Mehboobani is the champion at the moment. “My dream is to become professional and win an international tournament,” he says.