



First Golf Tournament Checklist for Parents

Created by **The Junior Tee**

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Your child's first golf tournament does not need to come with big expectations. It does not need to be about winning, placing well or shooting a certain score.

The goal is much simpler: help your child understand how tournament golf works, get through the day, and know what to expect next time.

Use this checklist before, during and after your child's first junior golf tournament.

1. Choose the right first tournament

For a first event, choose something beginner-friendly rather than jumping straight into a serious 18-hole tournament.

Good starting points include **US Kids Golf local tours**, local primary school competitions, academy events or other beginner junior golf days.

Many of these events are only **9 holes**, use **junior tee distances** and do **not require an official handicap**, which makes them much more manageable for a first tournament.

Check before entering

- Is the event suitable for beginners?
- Is it 9 holes or 18 holes?
- Does your child need an official handicap?
- Are junior tee distances used?
- How do the age groups work?
- Are caddies or parent walkers allowed?
- What is the entry fee?
- What time must you arrive?
- Where and how do you enter?

2. Help your child understand the basics

Your child does not need to know every golf rule before their first tournament, but they should understand the basic habits that keep the round safe, fair and moving.

Practise before the day

- Knowing when it is their turn to play
- Standing safely while others are hitting
- Marking the ball on the green
- Raking bunkers after playing from the sand
- Moving between shots without holding up the group
- Counting every shot properly
- Writing down scores after each hole
- Asking for help if they are unsure about a rule

Also explain that tournament golf means counting **every shot**, including missed swings, short putts, penalty shots, lost balls and balls hit out of bounds.

3. Pack the golf bag

Most junior tournaments allow children to use a push or pull cart, especially at beginner level. This helps a lot, but it is still worth keeping the bag practical.

Extra snacks and water are useful, while too many unnecessary items can make the bag harder to manage during the round.

Packing checklist

- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Small snacks
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Cap
- ☐ Rain jacket
- ☐ Sand bag, if required at the course
- ☐ Extra golf balls
- ☐ Tees
- ☐ Ball marker
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Small towel
- ☐ Pitch mark repairer, if your child is old enough to use it properly
- ☐ Scorecard holder, if they use one
- ☐ Spare glove, if they wear one

4. Pack snacks that actually work

Do not turn the golf bag into a full picnic basket, but do pack enough small bites for your child to eat between holes.

Tournament rounds can take longer than expected, and children often need something before they realise they are properly hungry.

Good grab-and-go snacks

- ☐ Fruit

- ☐ Biltong
- ☐ Crackers
- ☐ Mini muffins
- ☐ Small sandwich
- ☐ Energy bar
- ☐ Nuts or trail mix, if allowed and suitable for your child

For 18-hole tournaments, do not rely on a long halfway house stop. There is often only enough time to grab a quick sandwich or drink between the first and second nine before heading straight back out.

The aim is not to overpack, but to avoid the very real back-nine situation where your child is tired, hungry, slightly sun-baked and suddenly expected to make sensible golf decisions. This has never helped anyone.

5. Arrive early

A rushed arrival makes the first tournament feel harder than it needs to be.

Your child may need to register, collect a scorecard, find the putting green, warm up and get to the first tee before their starting time.

Before tee-off

- ☐ Arrive with enough time to park and find registration
- ☐ Register your child, if required
- ☐ Collect the scorecard
- ☐ Confirm the tee time and starting hole
- ☐ Check who your child is playing with
- ☐ Find the toilets before the round starts
- ☐ Do a short warm-up
- ☐ Get to the first tee on time

A few putts, a few chips and some easy swings are usually enough. This is not the moment to fix a swing, change a grip or give ten things to remember before the first tee.

6. Keep the first tee simple

The first tee can make even confident children nervous. There may be other players, parents and organisers nearby, and your child may suddenly behave very differently from how they do during practice.

A poor first shot is common and does not need a big reaction.

Keep the message simple

- ☐ Play safely
- ☐ Count properly
- ☐ Keep moving
- ☐ Ask an official if you are unsure

- ☐ Carry on after a bad shot

Avoid technical corrections straight after the opening shot unless advice is allowed and your child genuinely needs it.

7. Know your role during the round

Every tournament has its own rules about what adults may and may not do during play.

Some events allow adults to walk with the group. Some allow caddies. Some allow limited help. Others expect children to play independently.

Check the rules

- ☐ Are parents allowed to walk with the group?
- ☐ Are caddies allowed?
- ☐ May you give advice?
- ☐ May you help with scoring?
- ☐ Are push or pull carts allowed?
- ☐ Are there any specific pace-of-play rules?

If advice is not allowed, stick to encouragement and practical support only. Do not coach from the side, suggest clubs or correct decisions during play.

Even when advice is allowed, try not to manage every shot. Your child needs to learn how to choose a club, make a decision, recover from a mistake and keep the round moving.

8. Prepare for big emotions

Even the most enthusiastic child can meet themselves on the golf course during a first tournament.

This is not their familiar home course. There may be new holes, new children, an official draw, scorecards, trophies or medals on display and a few players who already look very comfortable in the tournament setting.

Golf is also a hard sport, even for adults. Bad shots, lost balls, missed putts and difficult holes can pile up quickly.

In our experience, there are almost always tears somewhere on the golf course.

When things get emotional

- ☐ Stay calm
- ☐ Keep your response short
- ☐ Do not make one bad hole feel bigger than it is
- ☐ Help your child breathe and move on
- ☐ Focus on the next shot or next tee
- ☐ Leave the full discussion for after the round

A first tournament teaches your child what competition feels like, and that part takes time.

9. Scoring and honesty

Scoring is one of the most important parts of a first tournament.

Your child needs to count every shot and record the correct score. If they are unsure about a rule, a penalty or what score to write down, they should ask a playing partner, marker or official before the card is handed in.

Remind your child

- ☐ Count every shot
- ☐ Include penalty shots
- ☐ Count short putts
- ☐ Do not change a score to make it look better
- ☐ Ask if unsure
- ☐ Check the card before handing it in

It is better to have a high honest score than a low score that is not correct.

10. After the round

After the last hole, your child may need to check, sign and hand in the scorecard. Make sure they know where to go and what is expected.

Do not start with a full breakdown of every mistake. Your child may be tired, hungry, disappointed or just completely finished with golf talk for the moment.

After-round checklist

- ☐ Check the scorecard
- ☐ Make sure the card is signed, if required
- ☐ Hand in the card at the right place
- ☐ Thank playing partners, organisers and caddies if relevant
- ☐ Give your child time to breathe
- ☐ Start with what they handled well
- ☐ Talk about one or two things to practise next time

A useful question is:

“What did you learn today?”

That keeps the conversation practical without turning the whole car ride home into a golf lesson.

What counts as a good first tournament?

For a first event, it is already a solid start if your child:

- ☐ Arrived on time
- ☐ Teed off with the group

- ☐ Followed basic etiquette
- ☐ Counted honestly
- ☐ Finished the round
- ☐ Handed in the scorecard
- ☐ Understood the process better by the end of the day

A first tournament does not need to be perfect. It simply needs to give your child a real introduction to competition golf and a clearer idea of what comes next.

Disclaimer: Tournament rules, formats and entry requirements can differ between organisers, so always check the official event details before the day.