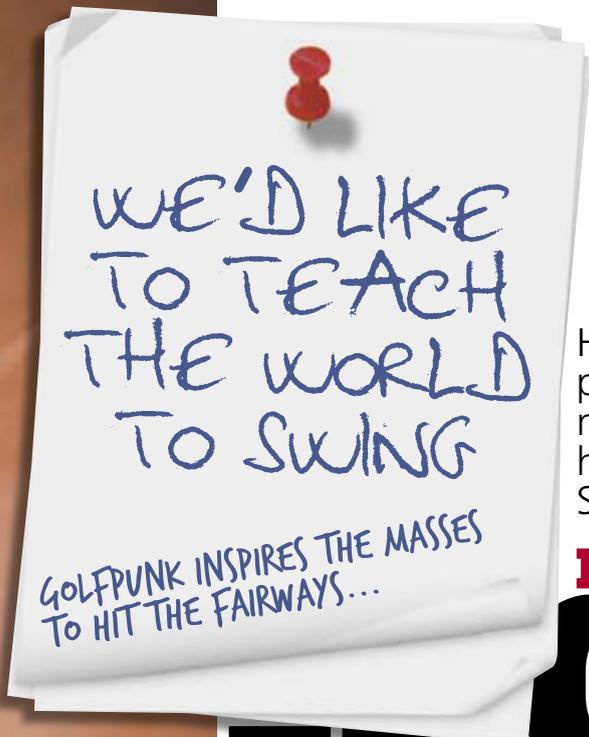




Chris Kamara,
Low-Laithes
Golf Club,
April 2008.



WE'D LIKE
TO TEACH
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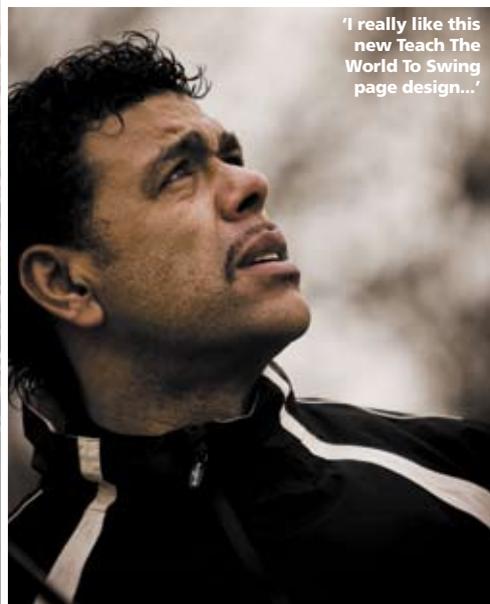
GOLFPUNK INSPIRES THE MASSES
TO HIT THE FAIRWAYS...

How would the TV presenter and former no-nonsense Leeds United hero cope under the Swing School spotlight...?

No. 25

Chris Kamara

Words: Richard Lenton Photography: Darren Arthur



'I really like this new Teach The World To Swing page design...'

When I canvassed GP's talent-laden editorial team for their opinion on luring Sky Sports presenter and former Leeds United hard man Chris Kamara into Celebrity Swing School, the verdict was pretty unanimous. "He'll be spot on. He's a top bloke, go get him."

I already had a fair inkling that Kammy would be good value. In a previous life I also worked for the Murdoch empire, and one lunchtime in the canteen, just as Kammy was about to take a bite from his overflowing plate of bangers and mash, a former colleague of mine hollered, "THAT'S UNBELIEVABLE JEFF...A SAUSAGE!!" Rather than get the hump, like so many precious media darlings would, the popular Soccer Saturday reporter and Goals on Sunday presenter laughed himself sideways.

Chris and the word 'unbelievable' became synonymous during his early days on Soccer Saturday, when he seemed to begin every one of his maniacal, high-octane match reports with the U-word. An eagle-eyed producer of the show then put together a compilation of 'unbelievable' Kammy moments for the Christmas special, and the rest is history.

But catchphrases – if 'unbelievable' can be classed as such – are a potential curse. Anyone who saw the Extras Christmas Special and the gradual unravelling of Andy 'Are You Having A Laugh' Millman will testify to that... However, like the sadly deceased Jeremy Beadle, Kammy is very much game for a laugh, and revels in the banter. And, as I discover when I traipse up to Wakefield to take

Kammy for his induction into GP's golfing brotherhood, he's also a genuinely nice, generous spirited guy.

Rather than meeting us at his local course, Low Laithes, Kammy insists on welcoming photographer Darren and I into his spacious family home that sits on several acres of land in the West Yorkshire village of Kirkhamgate. It's a homely, welcoming house, far removed from the ostentatiousness found in the cribs of many modern day, high-rolling footballers.

Kamara plied his trade as an uncompromising full-back and midfielder primarily during the 70s and 80s when the game was far less fashionable than it is now. This was an era when hatchet men could commit GBH in the middle of the park without so much as a warning from the referee, while off the pitch hooliganism was rife. Ironically, the game was revolutionised by his current employers, Sky, who pumped millions into the not-so-beautiful game in the early 90s. The old First Division was rebranded as the all-singing, all-dancing Premier League, and a host of foreign stars descended upon our shores at a time when Kammy was at the tail end of a career that included pit stops at the far from glamorous surroundings of Swindon, Brentford and Luton.

He is best remembered for his short stint at Leeds, when he helped guide the sleeping giants back into the top flight after replacing David Batty towards the end of the 1989-90 season. His partner in the midfield engine room was another shrinking violet, Vinnie Jones...



Paul is not about to give Chris a blowjob, I repeat - Paul is not...



'They're gonna put that bloody blowjob gag in aren't they...'

Chris also tried his hand at management, guiding Bradford City to promotion from League One in 1996. However, after being surprisingly sacked by City, and following a short, unsuccessful spell at Stoke, Chris opted for a career in TV after impressing the powers that be at Sky while working as a studio guest.

However, what's inconceivable about Chris is that, despite enjoying a 23-year career in football, he never once picked up a golf club in anger during his many afternoons off. But he's got a damn good reason to learn now...

"We have a tournament for charity in Tenerife in June each year. I've got a place out there, and I've promised to play in the tournament for the first time this year. I was going to just go and enjoy the sun again and duck out of the golf but I can't now that I'm doing this!" he says as we arrive at Low Laithes on a sunny but bitterly cold 'spring' morning.

Chris is greeted by a succession of friendly hellos from the members, but, as a normal bloke and pillar of the community, he doesn't attract the kind of head turning you'd expect if a TV personality turned up unannounced at his local course. Mind you, us Yorkshire folk would struggle to get excited at the prospect of the Queen



DID YOU KNOW?

When Chris left school in the mid 70's he was offered an apprenticeship at his home-town club, Middlesbrough. However, he was forced to turn it down by his father, who was worried that he was mixing with the wrong crowd, and enlist in the Royal Navy. "He wanted me away from the culture in Middlesbrough," recalled Kammy. "I joined the Navy but I only played sport. I got my break when I was transferred to Portsmouth base from Plymouth. I played against Portsmouth youth team for the Navy and scored a couple of goals. Ian St John had just taken over as manager, and he bought me out for £200, which still goes down as the worst deal in Pompey's history!"

turning up to play in the monthly medal...

Although he's been cramped in the back of my grossly mistreated motor for the five-minute trip from his house, Chris still manages to look immaculate in his brand new Glenmuir clobber. Despite being over six-foot tall, he's also a lean 12 stone 12 - only a few pounds above his playing weight - and looks a good decade younger than his 50 years. And, with a spanking new set of Benross VeloCT clubs, he well and truly looks the part as he jumps on the back of golf pro Paul Browning's buggy and roars towards the practice area. But would look be deceiving? As a former sportsman he's sure to be blessed with good hand-eye coordination, but learning a new skill when you're beyond the half-century mark is surely going to be difficult...

Kammy looks unusually nervous and uncomfortable as Paul hands him a three-wood and begins talking him through the grip. He listens intently, but the apprehension is etched on his face, and, as he uncoils a few awkward looking practice swings, I feel certain that we're going to be in for an embarrassing hour or so with our subject singularly failing to make contact with the ball. Kammy's left heel comes so far off the ground during

his backswing that he's up on his size 11 tiptoes like a West End ballerina. But this swing is anything but balletic...

Paul hands Chris a six-iron. "It's a middle of the road club. If you can hit this you can hit anything," Paul explains. He then lays two clubs parallel on the ground with the ball in the middle. "I want you hitting the ball on this line. When you address the ball I want your feet, hips and shoulders square to the club," he adds.

The backswing is then dissected into two parts. Paul makes Chris pause at the waist to check that his club is still parallel to the two clubs on the ground, before turning into the full backswing and finally uncoiling and striking the ball. Chris's first shot dribbles a few yards to the right. It's an inauspicious start...

Paul offers a few words of wisdom and manoeuvres Chris back into the start position. His second attempt is an air shot... I hand Chris a jacket, partly to protect him from temperatures that must have slipped below zero with the wind chill factor, but also to relieve the tension.

For the next 20-minutes Chris perseveres without much success, but then, without warning, he unleashes a fizzing six-iron straight down the middle of the fairway. It's as long as it is unexpected.



'That's unbelievable Jeff - I've hit one!!'



'Right, just forget that the ball's there and swing. Oh, hang on, it's not...'



That's it Chris, keep that left arm nice and straight...!

"That's more like it. You're swinging the club and the ball's getting in the way now. You're not just trying to hit it," says Paul. With the tension lifted, Chris finally cracks a smile. "Thank God for that," he says.

Kammy continues to mix solid shots with an understandable amount of slices, but when he gets it right the results are impressive. "Great shot," coos Paul as Kammy melts another six-iron into orbit. The tension's gone, the smiles are wider and boys' banter fills the icy cold air. As Paul drops to his knees in front of Chris to adjust his feet position, Darren moves in to take a snap. "Oi. If you put that in with a caption about me giving him a blowjob then you can fuck off!" says Paul. "I know what you GOLFPUNK boys are like." As if we would Paul...

Kammy appears to be a changed man as he jumps on the buggy and heads off towards the clubhouse after finally calling it a day. Gone is the hunched, nervous look of a man heading for a showdown with his irate missus; the chest is puffed out and he's wearing the self-satisfied glow of someone who has exceeded his own expectations.

"Looks like you'll be up for the Tenerife challenge then Chris?" I ask as Kammy strolls out of the pro shop clutching the brand new pair of golf shoes he's just shelled out for.

"Absolutely. I've got two or three acres at the back so now I've got these clubs, shoes and all the gear I can go and have a whack," adds Chris, who reveals that he has always been a closet fan of the sport.

"To be honest I love watching golf. I'm a gambler, and every tournament I back Tiger – he's won me bundles. I don't really bet ante post, I go tournament to tournament and then have a bet hole to hole – 99 times out of 100 I'll back him. He doesn't let me down very often."

"And I take it you're not going to let yourself and your mates in Tenerife down by jibbing out of the golf?" I ask.

"No chance. I'm looking forward to it now – and I never thought I'd say that." Job done. **GP**

SWING THOUGHTS With Paul Browning, golf professional at Low Laithes GC, Ossett, near Wakefield.

"I didn't want to bombard him with too much on a first lesson – there's an awful lot to take in. At first even the most confident people can be nervous and worried that they're going to miss the ball, but when you've hit a few the confidence grows.

"Chris has got a good eye for a ball being an ex sportsman. That's always going to help. If you've never played a game in your life then you'll find it really difficult.

"Chris struggled with allowing his weight to go through onto his left side. When you first start, you've got a club and a ball and instinctively you just want to smash it. But when you watch top players on the TV, when they come down, they've got all the time in the world and it allows you to come onto the left side with balance. Towards the end we started to get through onto the left side with some nice balanced shots.

"Another piece of advice I gave him was to ignore the ball and just think about swinging and then the ball gets in the way. The more you try to hit it the harder it is. The hardest thing is transferring a nice practice swing into the real thing.

"Everybody tends to be tense first time and Chris was no different. But I thought he did very well."



A BIG THANKS TO...
Glenmuir (www.glenmuir.co.uk) for providing Chris with his stylish golfing attire, and Benross (www.benrossgolf.com) for giving us a set of spanking new clubs. For details of Low Laithes Golf Club visit www.lowlaithesgolfclub.co.uk

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