South Gippsland Men's Country Week Report – 2026

Ballarat District | 14–16 September 2026

The South Gippsland men's representative team faced one of its toughest challenges of the year at the 2026 Golf Australia Victorian Country Week Teams Matches, contested across Buninyong Golf Club, Midlands Golf Club and Ballarat Golf Club from 14–16 September.

After an outstanding 2025 campaign in which South Gippsland won the Plate Division, the 2026 team stepped up to compete in the **Shield Division**, putting the district's best players against the leading country associations in Victoria. South Gippsland Golf describes Country Week as the pinnacle event for its representative golfers.

A demanding step up

The move into the Shield Division presented a significant challenge. South Gippsland was drawn against some of the strongest country associations in Victoria, including defending champions West Gippsland, South Western, Murray Darling and Ballarat.

We were also down three of our most experienced players: Isaac Batty, Chris Buckland and Steve Bromby – forcing selectors to promote juniors Billie Wrigley and Ethan Smith from our junior pennant team.

The tournament was played over three days in match-play format, with each team contesting seven individual matches in each round. The depth and experience of the opposition meant that every match was going to be hard fought.

Round 1 – Murray Darling

South Gippsland opened its campaign at Buninyong Golf Club against Murray Darling.

The first round was an important opportunity for the team to establish itself in the top division and settle into the conditions and demands of Country Week match play.

The team battled strongly throughout the round, with several matches going deep into the closing holes. Although the overall result did not go South Gippsland's way, the competitiveness of the individual matches demonstrated that the team was capable of matching players at Shield Division level.

Note: We had chances to win this match 4/3 but lost at least two matches on the 18th.

R**ound 2 – West Gippsland**

The second match of Monday was against defending champions West Gippsland.

West Gippsland entered the tournament with a particularly strong side and ultimately went on to successfully defend the Shield. The West Gippsland side recorded a **6–1 victory over South Gippsland**, although the score did not fully reflect how competitive a number of the matches were.

For South Gippsland, this was an opportunity to measure itself against the benchmark team in Victorian Country Week. The experience gained from playing against such a strong and experienced line-up will be valuable for future campaigns.

Note: We were up in most of these matches through the front nine and the 6/1 scoreline flatters West Gippsland. This is probably the worst result we could have got on the day.

Round 3 – South Western

Tuesday morning brought a match against South Western at Midlands Golf Club.

Again, South Gippsland faced a quality opposition and the team continued to compete hard across the seven matches. The players showed considerable resilience after the demanding opening day, with the emphasis remaining on taking individual opportunities and maintaining pressure throughout the matches.

Note: We halved this match although again matches were lost on 17th and 18th holes. A bit of luck and we could have secured victory.

Round 4 – Bye

South Gippsland had the afternoon off on Tuesday, providing a valuable opportunity for the players to recover and prepare for the final day's contest.

The break was particularly useful given the demanding nature of Country Week, where players can be required to play two full match-play rounds in a single day.

Round 5 – Ballarat

The final match was against Ballarat at Ballarat Golf Club.

Playing the host district on its home course provided another significant challenge. By this stage the South Gippsland players had gained three rounds of Shield Division experience and were able to finish the tournament strongly.

Note: We moved Arron Morris up in the order to #2, and he relished the opportunity winning an important match against a +4 marker on their own course.

The 4.5/2.5 loss was enough for South Gippsland to retain its spot in the Shield division for 2027, which is a remarkable result given the challenges the team faced.

The bigger picture

While the 2026 campaign did not produce the silverware South Gippsland achieved in 2025, the performance needs to be viewed in the context of the significant step up in standard.

South Gippsland had won the Plate in 2025 after recording three wins from its opening three matches. The 2026 campaign was therefore about testing the district against the best teams in the Shield Division rather than simply defending a previous position.

The defending champions, West Gippsland, ultimately went back-to-back, highlighting the quality of the division South Gippsland had entered. Their campaign included a 6–1 win over South Gippsland before they defeated Ballarat 4–3 and then secured the Shield against Murray Darling.

A valuable learning experience

Country Week is about considerably more than the final ladder position. The South Gippsland players gained valuable experience competing against highly accomplished representative golfers, many of whom regularly play at a very high level.

The team also demonstrated the qualities expected of a South Gippsland representative side: commitment, sportsmanship, competitiveness and support for teammates.

Playing three different courses in the Ballarat district also tested the players' ability to adapt quickly to unfamiliar layouts and changing conditions. The match-play format adds another dimension, requiring players to remain positive and focused regardless of the score.

Looking forward

The 2026 Country Week campaign should be regarded as an important part of the continued development of men's representative golf in South Gippsland.

The step into the Shield Division exposed the team to the highest level of country representative competition in Victoria. That experience should provide a strong foundation for future South Gippsland teams.

The challenge now is to build on that experience, encourage more players to aspire to Country Week selection and ensure that the district continues to develop the depth required to compete consistently at Shield Division level.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you is due to all of the players who represented South Gippsland, as well as the support staff, caddies, selectors, sponsors and South Gippsland Golf officials who contributed to the campaign.

Huge thanks to Wayne Kennedy and Ian Balfour for their excellent support of the team, and to our men's match committee, Mark Carruthers, Geoff Cohen and Jason King for their commitment to ensuring the players had everything they needed to compete.

The team would also like to thank Sth Gippsland Golf Inc for the accommodation, food, golf uniforms and equipment for this year's tournament.

Country Week requires considerable preparation and commitment from everyone involved. Representing South Gippsland is an honour, and the 2026 team can be proud of taking on the challenge of the Shield Division.

The result may not have been what the team hoped for, but the experience gained in 2026 provides an important building block for the future of South Gippsland men's representative golf.

Regards

Roy Fleming

Team Manager