

UK Hosts First Footgolf International Open

Players from around the world descend on Manchester to compete in a sport that is taking the UK by storm.

The first UK International Open for the new sport of footgolf is hoping to showcase the game.

It starts in Manchester, with competitors from across Europe hoping to win the title. The sport is a combination of two of the biggest participation sports in the world, so it is perhaps not surprising that its popularity is really kicking off. The UK is following in the footsteps of the US, where there are more than 200 courses, as well as countries including the Netherlands, Hungary and Italy. At a coaching session for young boys and girls at the UK Footgolf Academy at Doncaster College, ex-Premier League footballer Bryan Hughes teaches the basics. "In the UK at the moment we've got more than 40 courses," he said. "By the end of the year we'll have 60 to 70, and by the end of next year there'll be 200. So it's showing really rapid growth." There has already been a footgolf world championship, won by Hungary in 2012. Mike O'Connor, from UK Footgolf, said this weekend's tournament would highlight the appeal of the game. Hungary are the current world footgolf champions. "There are players from all over Europe coming to the event, and one from Argentina coming to take part," he said. "But it's open to everybody. There's a mixture of players coming, from some of the best footgolfers in the world to people who just enjoy having fun playing their favourite new sport." Many golf courses were initially wary of sharing their fairways with footgolf. But those promoting the game say they're gradually getting on side. An 18-hole footgolf course fits on to nine holes of a traditional golf course, and the 52-centimetre diameter holes don't have to be cut into the greens. Catherine Parkinson, from Doncaster College, told Sky News the decision to let the new sport use their underused golf course has been a blessing. "For us it is mainly about widening access to the sport and the community. But the commercial element has been a real bonus," she said. The course has taken more than 2,000 £10-per-round green fees in just a few weeks.