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All Roads Lead To Rome For Ryder Cup Worldwide Supplier Club Car



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"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A FIRM BELIEVER THAT THERE'S NO PLACE FOR A MOBILE PHONE ON THE COURSE, EVEN IF THERE ARE SPECIFIC POCKETS FOR ONE ON SOME OF THE MODERN GOLF BAGS"

FAIR COMMENT

When I first started playing golf, it was a liberating experience. Not only was I out in fresh air, getting exercise, I was able to enjoy good company – most of the time – and learn to play a new sport. Importantly, I was also unreachable.

Got a problem with one of my accounts? Tough, it'll have to wait until I get back in the office. Once I had my own business my partners became more important to me, and, with the creation of the mobile phone, they could reach me 24/7 if their problem was serious... or trivial, unfortunately.

The one place they won't reach me, however, even in 2023, is when I'm on the golf course. I've always been a firm believer that there's no place for a mobile phone on the course, even if there are specific pockets for one on some of the modern golf bags.

In an interview with Drumpellier Golf Club's general manager, Kerry Shields, in this edition, she echoes my view when she says: "I'm always on the phone; very rarely do you see me without my phone in my back pocket or in my hand, and I don't want to be that person who is constantly on the phone. So, when I'm out there playing golf, I don't even take my phone."

But, I hear you say – or at least I do for the purposes of this article – what about those of us who use our smartphone for GPS or scoring while playing? Personally, I don't like to, for as soon as I start to do so, all sorts of notifications come through, which, in addition to being irritating, might also distract my focus...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/autumn

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FEATURING

AUTUMN 2023



BRAD GOULD

THE GROVE

"From day one, we've never had a strict dress code – the only rule was that you couldn't have metal spikes on your golf shoes. The idea was to have fun and keep up with the group in front of you."

22



MARCUS DOYLE

DRUIDS GLEN

"We've outlined a very public ambition to bring major tournaments back here as well, which is what everyone wants to see. When people think of the Irish Open at Druids Glen, they think of the golden era of [the] Irish Open."

26



KERRY SHIELDS

DRUMPELLIER GOLF CLUB

"During my two years as general manager, I think it's really helped that I'm not a golfer because I don't look at things from a golfer's perspective. I look at it from just a person coming into the clubhouse."

30



KARL HEPPLER

STOKE BY NAYLAND

"Because I work in the industry, I quite often walk into clubs and I put myself in the place of a 23-year-old woman. Because I know that's the demographic that we miss in golf. And I say, so am I comfortable here, and nine times out of ten, it's no."

34



NATHANAËL PIETRZAK-SWIRC

UGOLF INTERNATIONAL

"Having spread our wings to Spain, Germany and beyond Europe, our aim is to take our unique formula for success to far reaches of the globe. We are excited for what the future holds as we enter a new era with the launch of UGOLF International."

42

"CLUB CAR HAS A WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RYDER CUP. THERE AREN'T TOO MANY BRANDS THAT HAVE ENJOYED THE SAME LENGTH OF COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT WITH ONE SPORTING EVENT"



COVER STORY

CLUBCAR.COM



The iconic red and blue captains' golf cars are the ones in the spotlight at the Ryder Cup, but behind the scenes hundreds more Club Car vehicles are helping the event run smoothly.

Around 550 golf, turf and utility cars are now on site at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club located just outside Rome, Italy, where the 44th edition of golf's greatest team contest will take place at the end of September.

It will be the seventh consecutive European Ryder Cup for Club Car, who have been an official supplier for the past 26 years having first been involved in 1997 when the European Team, captained by the inspirational Seve Ballesteros, famously won the event when it was staged at Valderrama, Spain.

Earlier this year, Club Car became a Worldwide Supplier for this year's event, with Club Car's president Mark Wagner stating: "Not many brands have Worldwide Supplier status so this is a fantastic honour for Club Car."

Kevin Hart, Club Car's golf sales director EMEA, added: "Club Car has a wonderful relationship with the Ryder Cup. There aren't too many brands that have enjoyed the same length of commercial involvement with one sporting event, and we're proud of that long history.

"Having reliable, high-quality vehicles is crucial to the complex logistical operation that is the Ryder Cup, and for 26 years Club Car has delivered again and again."

Back in 1997, the vast majority of the 200-strong fleet was electric at a time when around 95 per cent of golf buggies were powered by petrol.

That was the decision of the late Jaime Ortiz-Patiño, the then owner of Valderrama, who was a champion of green energy.

This year, a team of around 35 experts will look after the fleet, which includes Onward models for the team cars as well as a variety of golf and utility cars for many different areas of the event, including TV broadcasting, catering, greenkeeping and spectator transportation.

Coordinating the delivery of so many vehicles to one place is no mean feat, and required a significant amount of planning.

Some of the vehicles earmarked for the Ryder Cup have been at Marco Simone for many months, helping the staging team with the event build.

However, the main bulk arrived in August with the help of two of Club Car's European distributors – Germany-based Cart Care Company and UK-based Tractor Hire.

Hart, who has been at every Ryder Cup since 2002, with the exception of the pandemic-affected 2021 edition at Whistling Straits, added: "With Club Car having been involved with the Ryder Cup for so long, our teams are well-versed in dealing with the challenge an event this size poses.

"Nevertheless, it's always a relief once all the vehicles are safely on site and ready to go." **END**



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SCAN ME



"MAYBE THEY STILL SEE GOLF AS AN ELITE SPORT AND REGARD SUCH
VANDALISM AS 'GIVING IT TO THE MAN'"



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I'M TYRED OF THIS VANDALISM

Barely a week goes by now, without my Google alerts throwing up the latest example of golf course vandalism; increasingly, it would seem, the churning up of fairways and greens by quad bikes, motorbikes, or misappropriated buggies. Without wishing to sound like Colonel Bufton-Tufton, KFC & (Public) Bar, honorary secretary of the Old Gammons Golf Club, whatever is wrong with young people these days? I think it's fair to assume it's 'young people', as most people are younger than me; plus, I can't somehow see an early 30s middle-management type taking his Volvo XC40 for a jaunt on the par-five dogleg 14th.

'They've nothing to do; they're bored' scream the do-gooders, attempting to defend the indefensible. Bored? How can the youth of today be bored? In my day we'd only just got colour television and were still a good few years shy of the groundbreaking home entertainment system that was the Sinclair Spectrum. Admittedly we did go off and find some lush grass to churn up, but it was a football pitch – or it was to us – where, as well as expending energy and not being bored, we got exercise, fresh air and, more often than not, a mouthful of expletives from the local drunk whose early evening kip on the park bench had been disturbed.

Nowadays, not only are there too many TV channels for even Charlie Brooker to need, almost every home comes with a digital-entertainment-games-console system with the computing power to put a small town on the Moon in 1969, let alone a lunar module. Playstations, Nintendos, Xboxes, ... the list goes on. Not to mention their black mirrors – another Charlie Brooker reference – and their social media, apps, games, and nic-nac, or whatever it's called.

They don't even have to go the pub, youth club, or milk bar to find a date. Just swipe right – or is it left – and you're set up for the evening. The part of me that retains a social conscience, nags away with the thought that perhaps it's the level of society that can't afford all these things that maybe gets bored and choose to go out and vandalise green spaces.

Why golf courses? Why don't they attack bowls clubs or local football grounds? Well, they do, occasionally, though golf courses are big wide-open spaces and, arguably, easier to sneak on to. Plus, maybe they still see golf as an elitest sport and regard such vandalism as 'giving it to the man'. Many years ago, I read a story about a course manager who had engaged with a young man who had been caught vandalising his fairways. He took him under his wing and taught him about greenkeeping; the last I heard he was still working full-time at the club, having become gamekeeper rather than poacher. Maybe more clubs could try this once the culprits are apprehended.

Anyway, as the old adage goes, 'let he who is without sin cast the first stone'; I have to admit I once fired a spudgun through my neighbour's open car window and hit his passenger. I blame those Elvis Presley movies. **END**



NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



PING REVEAL OFFICIAL 2023 EUROPEAN SOLHEIM CUP TEAM UNIFORM

PING has revealed the official 2023 Solheim Cup team uniforms to be worn by Team Europe at the upcoming event in September. Following on from 2021, the European Solheim Cup team will once again be dressed head-to-toe in performance PING apparel and fans now have an exclusive opportunity to purchase replica team kit, to show their support for the reigning tournament winners either at home or for those attending the event in Spain.

SEARCH 'PING' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



SUFFOLK-BASED GOLF CLUB OF THE YEAR PARTNERS WITH OBBI GOLF

When Seckford Golf Club in Suffolk won the coveted Golf Club of the Year award in March at the England Golf Awards, general manager, Tony Pennock and his team won industry-wide recognition for everything that had been achieved at the Woodbridge-based facility. And with the profile of the golf club raised nationwide, Pennock looked to partner with other industry leaders within their field, and when considering his compliance, safety and training, turned to Obbi Golf for assistance.

SEARCH 'OBBI GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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TROON SELECTED TO MANAGE SALGADOS GOLF COURSE IN PORTUGAL

Troon has been appointed by Highgate, the new operator of Salgados in Portugal, to manage Salgados Golf Course in Albufeira, Algarve. Troon International will oversee golf operations, agronomy and marketing for the course set along Portugal's Atlantic Ocean coastline. Salgados Golf Course is an 18-hole par-72 layout originally designed by Pedro Vasconcelos in 1994 and renovated by renowned landscape architect Álvaro Mano in 2012.

SEARCH 'SALGADOS' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



JON BROOK MOVES TO IMG MANAGED, DREAMLAND GOLF CLUB, AZERBAIJAN

Dreamland Golf Club in Baku, Azerbaijan and IMG have announced the appointment of Jon Brook as the club's new director of golf. Brook has recently moved to Baku and joins Dreamland from Las Colinas Golf & Country Club in Spain where he was director of golf, sports and residences for the past five years. With over 30 years' experience in the golf industry, Brook previously worked at multiple world class facilities including Abu Dhabi Golf Club and Saadiyat Beach in the UAE and Wentworth Club in England.

SEARCH 'JON BROOK' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



NEW TORO IRRIGATION BRINGS SAVINGS IN EFFICIENCIES TO BARTON-ON-SEA

A new Toro irrigation system is allowing Barton-on-Sea Golf Club to take control of Mother Nature and as a result it's seeing huge savings in efficiencies. Situated on the coastal cliff on the south coast between Christchurch in Dorset and Lymington in Hampshire, Barton-on-Sea Golf Club is a true links course in a windy and exposed location, which means an efficient irrigation system is vital to help control the elements and safeguard the course against Mother Nature.

SEARCH 'BARTON-ON-SEA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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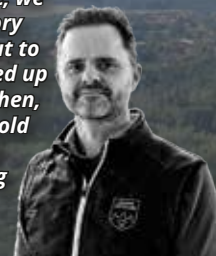
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// At first, joining the Boost Method consultation program - in order to develop our driving range - did not seem necessary. We were already pleased with our revenue at the range, and the idea of doubling it felt close to impossible.

Even though we were pessimistic, we decided to attend the introductory workshop and wow - it turned out to be our eureka moment! We signed up to the program right there and then, and The Bucket Pros agreed to hold the same workshop again for all our personnel. It was an amazing experience and enabled us to create an attainable, dream version of Kalmar Golf Club.



We joined the Boost Method in February, and despite a cold Swedish spring, we saw record figures at the range by April.

Karl-Martin Härström
CEO / Club Manager
Kalmar Golf Club

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GALVIN GREEN APPOINTS ITS FIRST GLOBAL SALES DIRECTOR

Premium hi-tech golf apparel brand Galvin Green has appointed experienced corporate executive Per Ågren to a new position as its Global Sales Director in a move designed to strengthen worldwide sales growth of its long-lasting and sustainably sourced garments for serious golfers. Ågren, who originates from Malmö and has previous golf industry sales experience with both Ecco and Achushnet, has assumed responsibility for driving wholesale business for Galvin Green in its main markets of North America, Europe and the Nordics.

SEARCH 'GALVIN GREEN' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



THE R&A AND GOLF NEW ZEALAND FORM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH DOTGOLF

The R&A and Golf New Zealand today announced they are forming a strategic partnership in the international golf technology solutions provider DotGolf. The New Zealand-based company was formed in 1999 and is a leading provider of technology solutions for golf clubs and organisations. The new strategic partnership will see The R&A and Golf New Zealand each take a 50 per cent equity stake in DotGolf. Murray Ward will continue in his role as Chairman of DotGolf, with The R&A and Golf New Zealand both having two directors on its board.

SEARCH 'DOTGOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



THE HERO DUBAI DESERT CLASSIC DRIVES SUSTAINABLE GOLF

The Hero Dubai Desert Classic (HDDC) has become the first golf event in the Middle East and first within the DP World Tour Rolex Series to achieve GEO Certified Tournament status, demonstrating the event's leadership among sustainable golf events. The distinction is awarded and assured by the international non-profit GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, and is based on the strength of commitment, breadth and depth of action, and range of tangible measured impacts across a broad sustainability agenda.

SEARCH 'GEO GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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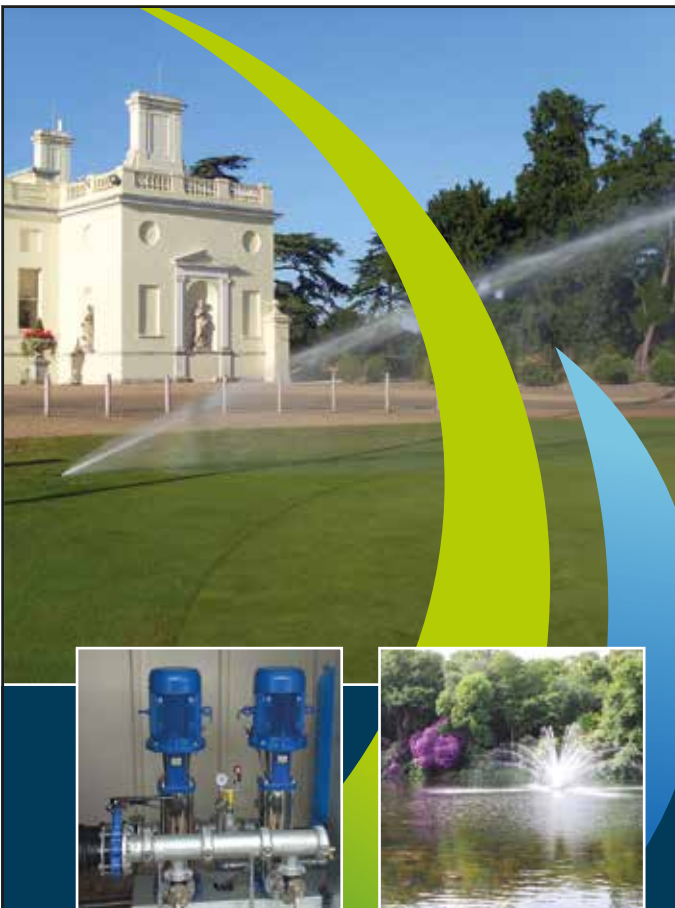
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ROYAL NORWICH INTRODUCES TURFCARE ACADEMY MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATION

Royal Norwich has introduced a new international sports turf qualification for students who want to specialise in golf. The golf and country club has launched the two-year full-time programme of study which will run in conjunction with the Performance Golf Programme. "We're proud to announce the introduction of our Turfcare Academy and Business Management qualification for students looking to specialise in a golfing background," says John Kerr, CEO of Royal Norwich.

SEARCH 'ROYAL NORWICH' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



REESINK AWARDED OUTSTANDING SALES ACHIEVEMENT FROM TORO

Pitched against Toro distributors from across the globe, Reesink has been awarded by Toro the International Outstanding Sales Achievement award for 2022 — high praise indeed for the company. In order to qualify for the award, distributors must have exhibited excellence in sales growth, a positive market share trend, and win rate — which includes new projects, large fleet replacements, and renovations. They must have participated in relationship building activities and delivered solid industry support.

SEARCH 'TORO' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



HOLLYWOOD ACTRESS BECOMES LATEST ADDITION TO R&A AMBASSADOR LINE-UP

Hollywood actress Kathryn Newton will use her star power to support The R&A's drive to make more people aware of the benefits of playing golf and inspire new audiences to take up the sport as a Global Development Ambassador. Newton, 26, has previously starred in Big Little Lies, The Society, Golden Globe and BAFTA award winning Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri and returned to big screens around the world in Marvel's Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania.

SEARCH 'KATHRYN NEWTON' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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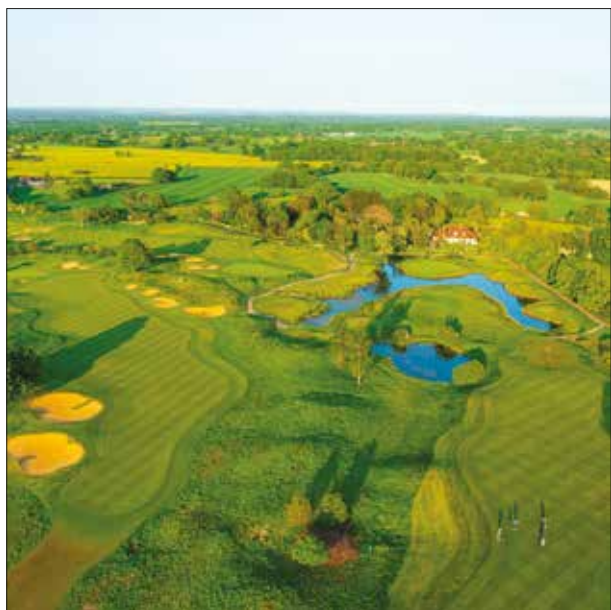


CHART HILLS DRIVES AHEAD WITH SECOND STAGE OF MAJOR RENOVATION WORKS

Chart Hills Golf Club has announced that the second phase of its major renovation project is now under way, as it continues with its significant multi-year investment. The renovation work, which is already underway, will include an extensive refurbishment of tee boxes across the course, and the completion of the new Sir Nick Faldo-designed par-3 course and putting green. "We're extremely excited to be working on another important phase in the enhancement of facilities at Chart Hills," said general manager, Anthony Tarchetti.

SEARCH 'CHART HILLS ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GOLF PARTICIPATION CONTINUES TO SURGE WORLDWIDE

The R&A today announced new global participation figures that show an additional ten million adult golfers are playing the sport worldwide since 2016. According to new research undertaken by the governing body, there are now 39.6 million on-course golfers (9 and 18 hole) in R&A affiliated markets. The research figures indicate that the growth trend began before the onset of Covid-19 and continued during the pandemic — up 34 per cent from 29.6 million on-course golfers in 2016. The sport has since continued to increase in popularity post-pandemic, up 15 per cent from 34.5 million on-course players in 2020.

SEARCH 'R&A' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



KOPPLIN KUEBLER & WALLACE APPOINT MICHAEL HERD TO NEW DIVISION

Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace (KK&W), a club industry benchmark and executive search and consulting firm, has appointed Michael Herd to spearhead a new UK-based international office, covering Mainland Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand together with Canada. Managing partner, Thomas Wallace III, CCM, CCE, ECM, commented: "Formalising our expansion into international markets marks a momentous milestone in our company's journey. We will continue to uphold our core values of integrity, education, respect, relevancy, quality, and fun, ensuring we build lasting relationships with partners, clients, and candidates worldwide."

SEARCH 'MICHAEL HERD GOLF' ONLINE

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NEW DESTINATION

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Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort in Co Wicklow, Ireland has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf, a portfolio of the world's premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

The five-star resort, commonly referred to as the 'Augusta of Europe' features two courses, The Glen and The Heath. Opened in 1995, The Glen hosted the Irish Open from 1996-1999, as well as the Seve Cup in 2002.

The Glen Course was closed in January 2022, with over €10 million invested in a re-imagining of the original Pat Ruddy and Tom Craddock par-71 layout.

Now a 7,222-yard par-72 course built to USGA standards, the restoration project involved stripping just over 90,000m² of top-soil and replacing it. Additionally, the greens required 7,000 tonnes of rootzone, 2,000 tonnes of gravel and 5,000m of drainage.

Druids Glen also invested €1.3 million in a modern RainBird wall-to-wall irrigation system, upgraded pathways covering a total of 26,000m² and a brand new clubhouse and pro shop.

The resort, which was originally built in the 16th century as Woodstock House, has a rich history that includes hosting famous musicians and being the site of four Irish Opens - with Colin Montgomerie and Sergio Garcia among the winners.

With the renovations, Druids Glen Golf Course is poised to reclaim its place as one of the top golf destinations in Europe as Séamus Neville, of owners the Neville Group said: "We have made a significant commitment to the renovation of Druids Glen golf course and clubhouse, with the aim of bringing it to the very top of the list of world-class golf courses." **END**



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BRAD GOULD

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, THE GROVE

THE GROVE

When you're dealing with some of the most famous people in the world, things need to be done to a certain standard.

But with any paying guest enjoying a stay and round of golf at The Grove, the A-list experience will match those same heights of service and overall experience afforded to any sporting legend, world leader or Hollywood star.

Now 20 years on from its opening, The Grove has forged its reputation in the industry and has become one of the undisputed major players in the London corporate golf landscape.

Just 18 miles from central London, half an hour away from Heathrow and a quick jaunt on Harry Potter's broomstick to the nearby Warner Bros. Studio Tour London, the Hertfordshire resort has already played host to some high-profile events in its relatively short existence and continues to thrive with 30,000 rounds played on the course per year.

Tiger Woods lit up the WGC-American Express Championship in 2006, while the 2016 British Masters – hosted by forthcoming Ryder Cup captain Luke Donald and won by Alex Noren – added further evidence on the quality of the golf course, which is kept in outstanding condition all year round by a team of 20 greenkeepers and boasts superb USGA-specification greens.

Those high standards are of course paramount, but The Grove strikes that elusive balance of relaxed luxury, under the stewardship of director of golf, Brad Gould.

The 43-year-old Canadian is now well into his third year in the role but first joined

in 2007 in the golf reservations team and has made remarkable career progression through the ranks during that time.

But if you're expecting a hard-nosed, single-minded, ruthless tyrant who has fought his way to the top, think again.

"I started within a grassroots entry level position, but our owners and previous directors of golf were very much focussed on promoting talent from within and future industry leaders; so I certainly benefited heavily from that.

"I have been fortunate to learn from inspiring leaders during my time and haven't held a position for more than two years without some sort of progression or development," said Gould.

"The Grove's focus on delivering relaxed luxury has a great brand synergy with my own personal brand. Sometimes you just fit into the vision within your own character and personality which makes it much easier to come into work every day. We have a team who inspire me each and every day.

"Yes, we want our people to have the highest level of experience, but the benefit of having your leadership team having started in entry level positions have an unmeasurable benefit of delivering the vision of the product and team engagement.

"So, it's all about getting the right people in the team who will provide that welcoming, friendly experience. Simple things such as body language and walking out to greet guests to take their bags, rather than them coming to you is the kind of thing which makes a difference and we've worked hard on that over the years.





"BUT WE DON'T CHANGE ANYTHING FROM AN EXPERIENCE STAND-POINT – IT DOESN'T CHANGE IF YOU ARE HARRY KANE PLAYING AT FIRST LIGHT OR FAMILY PLAYING A TWILIGHT ROUND"

"Of course, you still have to hold high standards and we would never be afraid to tell someone if that standard is not being met. But it's not something that I need to do very often at all. I think our team are all aiming to maintain those high standards."

Originally from Calgary, Alberta, Gould gained a double degree in Kinesiology (Sports Science) and Education but then opted to live and work in the UK after meeting his now wife Sarah, while travelling in Australia.

Now on the board of the Club Manager's Association of Europe (England Region), the ten-handicapper explained: "I played a lot more baseball, basketball and ice hockey growing up and was the head coach of the high school basketball team when I was 21.

"Looking after 16/17-year-olds gave me a good grounding in a team leadership capacity from a young age.

"I spent a year in Europe when I was 19 before going to University and met my future wife traveling in Australia following studies. England probably wasn't number one on my list at the time, however after a few months of getting to know the people, landscape, architecture and history – I love it."

Gould admits the high-profile Tiger-fuelled event catapulted The Grove to a new standing, with plans afoot to bring another elite tournament to the venue in the coming years.

He said: "That event was part of the reason I was drawn to The Grove. I saw a bit of it on TV, and was able to ride the wave afterwards with the excitement and fanfare built around the tournament.

"The impact was immeasurable and helped The Grove really take off at a time when Tiger was at his prime. The feedback on both the layout and course condition was incredible from the players.

"It was great to be heavily involved in hosting the British Masters in 2016. It was ten years after the World Golf Championship event and it might be nice to do something again in 2026.

"There is certainly an appetite to host another big event but it's about getting the stars to align, having the right field and the right commercial opportunity on the back of it.

"We hosted the Rose Ladies Series this year and are committed to focusing on women's events in the future. So hosting another Tour event is certainly up there from an individual and business perspective."

Getting the stars to align could also be a term used in everyday life at The Grove, which has had its fair share of the famous stroll the fairways and enjoy the exceptional leisure facilities and fabulous restaurants.

Gould said: "You don't tend to get too starstruck as we've been doing it a long time now. Thankfully, we haven't had to deal with too many difficult celebrities. They are here to enjoy themselves on the course and appreciate the quality of course and service available.

"We have enjoyed having film celebrities from Mark Wahlberg, Bill Murray, Samuel L Jackson to sporting legends such as Gareth Bale, Wayne Rooney or Ben Stokes grace the fairways, so we've had a few of the A-listers here.

"Barack Obama and David Cameron played a match whilst both were in office which was quite unique and a big but satisfying challenge to the Operational team whilst having a full tee sheet.

"But we don't change anything from an experience standpoint – it doesn't change if you are Harry Kane playing at first light or family playing a twilight round.

"The Grove has been a pioneer of golfing inclusivity since it opened and the owners were passionate about having a product which is accessible to all. I understand that comes at a certain price point, but we are always trying to make that accessible.

"From day one, we've never had a strict dress code – the only rule was that you couldn't have metal spikes on your golf shoes. The idea was to have fun and keep up with the group in front of you.

"I would say golf has moved that way over the past five years or so, but The Grove was definitely at the forefront of that from a Championship golf course perspective.

"Our purpose is to deliver unforgettable experiences with genuine hospitality and our ambition is to be Britain's most-loved luxury destination."

At 20 years and counting for The Grove, those standards are only going to rise. **END**







Words Michael Lenihan
Online druidsglenresort.com

MARCUS DOYLE

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, DRUIDS GLEN



DRUIDS GLEN

Let's get straight to the point shall we? Druids Glen in Ireland is utterly spectacular, and one of the prettiest golf courses this correspondent has ever had the good fortune of playing in world golf.

All too often, marketing hyperbole and claim to being the world's best are used by PR agencies and marketers to elevate a club to make it appear to be better than it actually is, but in the case of Druids Glen in County Wicklow just outside Dublin, believe the propaganda. It's stunning.

Often referenced to as the 'Augusta of Europe' – a moniker that is more than merited – the 36-hole facility is headed-up by 37-year-old Marcus Doyle, a local lad who appears to be living every boy's childhood dream.

Growing-up in Arklow half-an-hour away, Doyle hails from a golf-mad family and has been playing the game from a very young age. Hooked on the sport, as a 12-year-old he was too young to carry a scoreboard when the Irish Open was first played at Druids Glen in 1996, a year after the resort opened for business.

Undeterred, the following year Doyle hoodwinked organisers into believing that he was 16 years old – when in reality, he was still too young to volunteer – but his tenacity paid dividends when he ended-up carrying the board for Colin Montgomery, Lee Westwood and Pádraig Harrington at the 1997 Irish Open.

"Due to my age, I wasn't the biggest guy in the world, so carrying that scoreboard around for four days was like carrying around a wind sail," he recalls.

"I was blown around Druids Glen for four days, but I absolutely loved it."

And this tenacity resulted in Doyle landing what he refers to as his "dream job" as director of golf at Druids Glen in March 2015, although his career could have been very different, especially if his mother had her say.

"I played golf all throughout my childhood, and my teen years, and was quite a good player, but never an elite player. I went to university in Leeds and qualified with a business and marketing degree, and at the time, my mother was a chartered physiotherapist with her own practice.

"One of her patients was a very senior bank official, so my Mum put one-and-one together, got two, and set me up with a job in banking which was probably one of the strongest industries in Ireland at the time.

"I worked in the bank for a while, but how I ended up going into golf was actually quite funny," smiles Doyle.

"I was working for AIB and I wanted time off to play in a golf tournament, and they couldn't give it to me because the bank was just so busy at the time. So, I handed in my notice and my Mum essentially went crazy.

"I was out of work then for a while, and I was actually hitting golf balls on a driving range one day when a guy came up to me and said, 'You look like a good player. We're one short for a charity scramble tomorrow, would you like to play?' And I just figured I had no job at the moment, so why not.

"I ended up playing with a guy who owned a golf holiday company that specialised in South Africa and Dubai, and after the round, he offered me a job selling golf holidays."



"IT'S A NEW ERA AND A NEW FOUNDATION FOR DRUIDS GLEN TO BECOME SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL"

This was Doyle's first foray into the golf industry, but as golf breaks to Portugal were proving easier to sell, he ended up working more in the Algarve than in Cape Town.

"I used to work with a lot of club managers in Portugal," recalls Doyle, so when the recession [in 2009] hit hard, the first thing to go was the golf holiday. I remember at the time saying to myself that it was time to go and get a proper job.

"I'd always got on well with the Portuguese golf managers, so I thought I could do the same role in Ireland, which is when I joined Synergy Golf – a management company – who gave me a job at a time when jobs were hard to come by in Ireland.

"They gave me my first steps into the golf business in Ireland, and I'll always be extremely grateful to them for that, especially as I learned a lot about running golf courses.

"Through career progression, I made it to Castleknock [as golf manager] and earned my stripes before making the move to Druids Glen and haven't looked back since."

Doyle joined Druids Glen in March 2015, and in the transpiring eight years has witnessed many changes, both on, and off the course. Opened in 1995, the parkland Glen Course – which hosted the Irish Open between 1996 and 1999 – was followed in 2003 by the Heath Course, with both courses sitting at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains.

But it is the Glen Course which has become famous the world over for its spectacular scenery, and which has been the primary focus of attention since the resort was purchased by the Neville Group in 2019 for a reputed €45million.

Shortly after acquiring the five-star resort, the Neville Group set about appraising the entire business as Doyle recalls: "That review was undertaken in conjunction with some of the leading golf consultants in the world.

"I was just in awe and starstruck of the John Clarkins of this world; the Peter McAvoy's of this world; the Jeff Lynchs of this world, and that I was now sitting at a table with them.

"Druids Glen had become a little tired throughout the recession, and it had strayed away from the original business concept and needed investment. And in fairness to the Neville family, no one envisaged the level of investment that they would make.

"We're eternally grateful for them. It's a new era and a new foundation for Druids Glen to become something very special."

Working with Peter McEvoy and Jeff Lynch, the Glen Course was closed in January 2022, with over €10 million invested in a re-imagination of the original Pat Ruddy and Tom Craddock par-71 layout.

The Glen now plays as a par-72, 7,222 yard challenge off the back tees, with fairways widened, trees and bunkers removed and a new RainBird irrigation system installed. Over 90,000m² of topsoil was stripped out by DAR Golf during the construction phase, which included re-building new tees, greens and a clubhouse.

The result, as Doyle alludes to, is something quite special, and since re-opening on June 1, 2023, the feedback from members and guests has been off the charts.

The course has been elevated to one of the very best in Europe, with Séamus Neville, of the Neville Group stating: "We have made a significant commitment to the renovation of Druids Glen golf course and clubhouse, with the aim of bringing it to the very top of the list of world-class golf courses."

And that includes one day hosting tournaments again as Doyle confirms: "We've outlined a very public ambition to bring major tournaments back here as well, which is what everyone wants to see.

"When people think of the Irish Open at Druids Glen, they think of the golden era of [the] Irish Open. And with our proximity to Dublin, our location and with a hotel on site, we're tailor-made to host it.

"And now, more importantly than anything, the golf course also lives up to that lofty standard of a European Tour event, and we'd love to showcase it."

As to Doyle's plans for the future, it's obvious talking with him how content he appears to be in Ireland. "I'm passionate about what I do, and I love what I do," he says. "When I set out on my golf management journey, I kind of had a dream that one day I could become general manager of my home golf club or something like that.

"But I think I've surpassed my every expectation by becoming director of golf at Druids Glen. It's just something I'm so proud of because I'm an Arklow man. I grew up here, and this is my home." **END**

KERRY SHIELDS

GENERAL MANAGER, DRUMPELLIER GOLF CLUB



Members of a certain vintage are inclined to cling on to some golf club traditions with blind devotion because 'we've always done it like that'. Similarly, they may be dismissive of new ideas because 'that's not what we do at this club'.

We have surely all heard such sentiments expressed at our club; we may even have heard ourselves expressing them.

Such reluctance to relinquish the past and an accompanying resistance to change could be because, as golfers, if you'll pardon the pun, we occasionally can't see the woods for the tees.

Which is why many clubs might do well to take the path trodden in the past decade at Drumpellier Golf Club, near Glasgow, Scotland, in appointing a non-golfer as general manager to bring an unblinkered view to the post. Well, former non-golfer, of which more later.

Kerry Shields began working at Drumpellier ten years ago as a part-time member of the bar staff, was elevated to bar manager fairly swiftly and then – having made a huge success of that – just before COVID cast its global pall she was offered and ultimately accepted her current post.

"During my two years as general manager, I think it's really helped that I'm not a golfer because I don't look at things from a golfer's perspective," says Shields. "I look at it from just a person coming into the clubhouse.

"Necessarily, yes, of course we want to get golfers in here, that is the ideal, but we have a really successful social membership as well because we do different things outwith," she explains.

The 31-year-old breathed new life instantly into Drumpellier's social calendar with the first function she organised, a karaoke, when 130 attendees were fed the familiar pre-round staple of bacon rolls.

Black tie occasions at the club are a thing of the past (pauses for gasps around the UK to fade out before continuing typing) with Shields commenting: "When it came to these and the dances, they were dying out anyway. People weren't attending.

"There was an older crowd of members who enjoyed them, which was fair enough, but the younger people were not coming to them, nor did they want to. Even the big dinners now, there isn't a formal event.

"We try to organise tribute nights and stuff like that. Our bar manager, Robyn Curran, is brilliant and she has organised a psychic night, and she's already sold over 50 tickets for it.

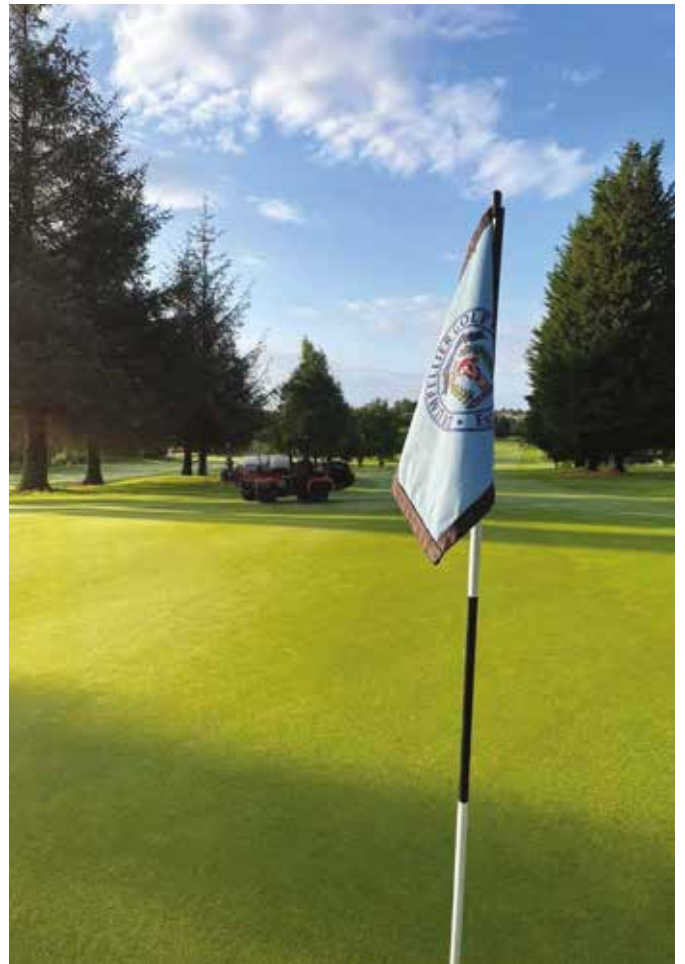
"What we've been noticing with that is a lot of members' wives have bought tickets to come with their friends, so on that night we'll have stuff out on the tables about social membership."

Shields is a firm believer that she needs to run Drumpellier both as a golf club and as a business. "The two do go hand in hand," she insists. "What I always say to the people who want to keep this golf club completely exclusive is, 'be my guest.

"However, you need to be prepared to be in this golf club supporting every single thing we do' – and they're not prepared to do that. Some want to dictate what everyone should be wearing, what they should be doing. You have to move with the times."







"IT BENEFITED ME THAT I WASN'T A GOLFER BECAUSE MEMBERS WOULDN'T SEE ME AND THEN WANT TO TALK ABOUT THEIR ROUND OF GOLF. THEY WOULDN'T WORRY ME ABOUT THE GOLF COURSE"

Switching from being a colleague to a boss carried the advantage of knowing her staff, but she was aware that she could retain a mutual manner of friendliness without needing to be friends.

"It isn't easy making that transition from being everybody's friend. I am not here to be friends with anybody. I'm here to do the best for Drumpellier Golf Club and to make sure the club is always performing how we want it to be, and sometimes you don't get on with some people.

"But I think the thing we have here is that we've all got respect for each other and I'm very, very good to the staff because I've been there, I've seen how it is to be treated a certain way. I always put myself in a situation of, 'when I was behind the bar, how would I have liked someone to come down and done this or that?'"

An additional benefit of being a non-golfer is that she is able to act as a conduit for passing on concerns about the course without being expected to pass judgement on their merits.

"It benefited me that I wasn't a golfer because members wouldn't see me and then want to talk about their round of golf. They wouldn't worry me about the golf course.

"They would email me about it, but I wouldn't stand and get into an argument about bunkers, about greens, because that's not my forte.

"I've got a head greenkeeper Colin Powrie who's done it for 30 odd years who knows exactly the answers to give them. I think general managers can spread themselves too thin, trying to be on top of too many things."

The past tense of being a non-golfer applies because, when Drumpellier took part in the Ladies Get Into Golf initiative, she attended with her mother and a friend – and now plays once a week, although not as yet under the guiding hand of partner Gordon Robertson, the club's professional, who has still to give her a lesson.

"I came along to the Ladies Get Into Golf event run by our assistant pro Aidan McAuley and I enjoyed it.

"I'm always on the phone," admits Shields, "and very rarely do you see me without my phone in my back pocket or in my hand, and I don't want to be that person who is constantly on the phone.

"So when I'm out there playing golf I didn't even take my phone. I was just out, trying to hit balls, and you're out getting a bit of fresh air and I get to catch up with my friend as well, finding out all the stuff that you'd be texting them about.

"I'm also getting my exercise in, so it ticks a few boxes for me."

The sessions impressively converted half of the dozen other attendees into members on a six-month trial basis. "The existing lady ladies members here have been extremely good.

"They come in at the end of the sessions and organise a Texas Scramble. Two lady members take two new ladies out and play seven holes and then all come into the clubhouse afterwards.

"We are just trying to make people feel included and even if they don't become a playing member at the end of the six months, hopefully they will become a social member."

Sunday is the one day of the week that Shields, Gordon and three-year-old daughter Orla get to spend time together. More of that time in the future may be devoted to golf as "my wee girl's now got her own wee clubs, proper clubs with headcovers on them.

"Everything we do is all altered around Orla, just to suit her," she says. "Sundays are the only day we get the three of us together, so we always have plans and they all come around Orla. There is some mum guilt," she confesses.

Plans at the club include moving towards being more sustainable and reducing energy costs where possible. "We have just finished getting a solar panel put on the roof," outlines Shields.

"Before in the golf club, everything used to be on constantly, now everything in the clubhouse is on a timer. All the lights come on automatically when you walk in." **END**



Words Michael Lenihan
Online stokebynayland.com

KARL HEPPLER

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, STOKE BY NAYLAND



A self-confessed Newcastle United football fan, times are exciting both personally and professionally for Karl Hepple, director of golf and leisure at Stoke by Nayland Resort in Suffolk.

In football parlances and backed by Saudi investment – the same wealth management fund that has financed LIV Golf – Newcastle United, or the ‘Toon Army’ are just about to embark on arguably their biggest season in living memory, as they prepare for Champions League football on Tyneside.

And whilst Hepple can look forward (hopefully) to an action-packed season on the football pitch, back on the golf course, his career is very much in the ascendency thanks to a recent promotion with added responsibility.

Hailing from Northumberland, Hepple moved to Suffolk in 2018, and recalls his first experience of the North/South divide, an often referred to split in UK geography.

“It was funny,” he recollects. “I remember driving down here for my second interview and people talk about the North/South divide quite a bit, and until you’ve experienced both, you don’t really typically know about it.

“I left home at 2pm, and I remember that it was light, and it was ten degrees. And I remember driving down here for five hours in the pitch black, and it was four degrees warmer in the dark than it was in the day-time in the northeast.

“And I was like, ‘You can understand why golf’s a bit more prosperous down here’ laughs the 31-year-old.

Growing-up, aged 12, Hepple got into golf through school friends and a few years

later, realised that he wasn’t half bad. That was when in his own words, “playing football became less of a priority.”

His first role in golf was at his local club, Longhirst Hall, recalling: “It was very new at the time, and I actually look back now and I think how forward-thinking it was.

“I’m going back near enough 20 years, and at that point they had flexible memberships in their offering. At the time it was a bit weird because it was the only club doing it, where-as looking back, I think actually those guys were really on it. Really on it.”

After finishing school, Hepple was considering a career in either teaching or physiotherapy, but after talking with the proprietor of Longhirst Hall, opted to stay, alternating roles between the pro shop, bar and even spending six months working on the greens.

“Looking back, that was a really good thing for me to do,” says Hepple, “as I don’t think many GMs or directors of golf have done that.”

Having gained a foothold in the industry, Hepple began his career proper in golf with MacDonald Hotels in April 2013, working at Linden Hall, Slaley Hall and for a year, on the Costa del Sol in Spain.

The opportunity to move to Maften Hall, again in Northumberland presented itself in May 2018, and following a six month stay, got the career break he was seeking when Hepple took over the vacant role of golf manager at Stoke by Nayland.

Located on the Essex/Suffolk border, and in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the resort boasts two highly respected courses, The Gainsborough and The Constable.



"OTHER CLUBS ASK ME WHY I USE 59CLUB, AND I THINK THAT THE OVERWHELMING THING IS THE ABILITY THAT THEY HAVE TO SHOW YOU INDUSTRY DATA FOR VARYING DIFFERENT THINGS"

A family-run business, Stoke by Nayland is owned by the Peake Family who founded the Copella apple juice brand, and has been home for Hepple for the past five years since arriving in November 2018.

Aware of the resort through its association with the EuroPro Tour and the Seniors Challenge Tour, Hepple's initial role was more administration than management as he explains: "The job that I was brought in to do, I probably was doing something vastly different within six months.

"It was a very traditional role, more of a secretary position than a golf manager. I was actually reporting to a board at the time, and I basically went to them, and I said: 'You're paying me to do not a lot here, really. This is what I think I should be doing.'

"And very quickly it became less of a working in the business job to working on the business."

He soon set about building a team that would help elevate not only his standing with the business, but perhaps more importantly, the operational effectiveness of the golf club. Now accountable for the leisure offering as well as the golf, Hepple has helped develop a unique business model for a golf hotel, that appears to be bucking the trend.

"If I look at how many golf break rooms we were doing in 2018 when I got here, versus our current projection for 2023, there will be an 80 per cent increase," he states.

"We're really lucky in the sense that we've got a really good sales team, and a good marketing team, and our job is to promote, market, and make sure that we're hitting the right demographics of people.

"Obviously we must be doing something right as 75 per cent of our business comes direct to us rather than using any tour operators. That's a really nice thing to have, because it just means that we don't have to give away any commissions."

And interestingly, when quizzed about the average length of stay, Hepple has a quite unique perspective. "We actually don't really want them staying for any more than a night," he admits. "We would rather sell one night twice than a two-night once, and it's because of the correlation between the food and beverage spend when somebody stays for two nights."

And this strategy appears to be working, although a two-round, one-night stay does put additional pressure on the tee-sheet with between 55,000 and 60,000 rounds per year, on each course.

"If you said those numbers to a private member's club, they would have a heart attack. Do we notice a difference? Yes, we do, predominantly because the golf course just wasn't built to facilitate that amount of golf."

Despite these constraints, membership is currently around 960 (up from 660 in 2018), and new initiatives to grow the game such as the 'Wednesday Club' are being actively rolled out, which advocates no rules, no dress code – just fun, for one hour a week.

Designed to bring newcomers into the resort – not necessarily the sport – Hepple is quite clear on his objective.

"Because I work in the industry, I quite often walk into clubs and I put myself in the place of a 23-year-old woman. Because I know that's the demographic that we miss in golf. And I say, so am I comfortable here, and nine times out of ten, it's no.

"Whereas you don't have that at Stoke by Nayland. You have an environment where pretty much every demographic of person is comfortable and wants to spend time. So because of that, our average age is 51 at golf, so it's pretty low in terms of comparing it to the industry average.

"If I was to compare it to a couple of clubs locally, I could almost bet my life on the fact that they're about ten years older than that."

Working with 59club, Hepple knows that those figures aren't randomly plucked from thin air as he explains: "I brought them in here, but I've worked with those guys for far longer than that.

"Other clubs ask me why I use 59club, and I think that the overwhelming thing is the ability that they have to show you industry data for varying different things – I just don't understand why somebody wouldn't want to know that."

As to the future, for now Hepple is content in 'Sleepy Suffolk' although like a star centre-forward, it may prove difficult for his current employers to retain their prized asset should a Premier sized golf facility put a bid in for his services.

Until then, it's a win-win for both sides. **END**

TERRAS DA COMPORTA

COMPORTA.COM

Words Pete Simm

Location Comporta, Portugal

David McLay-Kidd knew he had the chance to be involved in something very special when he first set eyes on the landscape at Terras da Comporta and was asked to design a golf course one hour south of Lisbon on the north-western coast of the Alentejo.

Surveying the scene and the plot of land occupying 84 hectares of natural, sandy terrain in a secluded coastal setting on the edge of the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, McLay-Kidd immediately saw the possibility to build a links course in Portugal that could match some of the best in the world.



That was back in 2008. The Dunas project has had to survive more than a few setbacks and bumps in the road along the way including a worldwide recession, the original owners going bankrupt and the small matter of a global pandemic.

But with the backing of Vanguard Properties – the largest real estate developer in Portugal – McLay-Kidd's first course in mainland Europe is now a glorious reality and is attracting global headlines for all the right reasons.

Having undergone a soft launch and opened for play for the first time in June, The Dunas Course will be officially inaugurated in early October.

Such have been the initial reviews that industry experts are already tipping the par-71 layout to not only become Portugal's number one course but one of the new stars of European golf.

Its architect, whose famous designs include Bandon Dunes, Queenwood, Beaverbrook, Machrihanish Dunes and the Castle Course at St. Andrews, certainly believes that there's nothing else to compare anywhere in southern Europe and is as excited as anyone at the project finally coming to fruition.

"I think after 15 years of effort, we are actually there. There's now no pandemic and no worldwide recession," said McLay-Kidd.

"I first came here in 2008 and it's absolutely stunning. If you look at any top 100 list, it is peppered by golf courses that are through pine, barren sand dunes – from the courses in Melbourne, Australia, to the courses in Long Island in the US and the stuff around the British and Irish coastline, they are generally through sand and through vegetation, and so here we are in southern Europe in Portugal with exactly that type of terrain.





"I'VE BEEN ASKED HOW I WOULD CHARACTERISE THE COURSE AND I WOULD SAY IT'S EASY TO CATEGORISE, IT'S A LINKS COURSE. IT'S NOT LINKS-STYLE, IT'S NOT LINKS-LIKE, IT'S A LINKS COURSE"

"I've been asked how I would characterise the course and I would say it's easy to categorise, it's a links course. It's not links-style, it's not links-like, it's a links course.

"You're playing as close to the beach as you can get in Portugal, you're in pure sand, you're playing on fescue grass with a golf course that wants you to read the ground, bounce the ball and run it around, using the contours to your advantage, so I don't know if there's anything out there that wouldn't tick the box as a links course as a definition that a Scotsman would give you."

One of two 18-hole courses being built at Terras da Comporta – the second, The Torre, is being designed by Sergio Garcia and is set to open in 2025 – The Dunas Course is the first of an array of sports and lifestyle facilities which are poised to be unveiled in the coming years, with others including horseriding, wellness and sailing as well as a wide range of plots for hotels, tourist and residential condominiums also on offer.

The original routing of The Dunas Course was actually not laid out by McLay-Kidd but by Donald Steel back in 2004, and the Scot had to embrace the original land plan and the corridors that the course was going through when he set out his plans for the site.

He also had to politely decline a request from the original owners to include a lake complex at the heart of the back nine, and the final finished version, with a liberal scattering of bunkers and waste sand areas in equal measure, is all the better for it.

As with so many of McLay-Kidd's more recent creations – he admits that he had a rethink about his design philosophy in 2009 after realising that his first courses were too hard for the average golfer – strategy and playability is the key, especially from the tee.

Lower handicappers may well prefer to take on the tiger lines which, executed properly, will leave the best chance for birdie but the architect has also been at pains to offer plenty of room on the fairways so that higher-handicap players can gain just as much pleasure and satisfaction from their course experience.

He explained: "Back in 2009 to 2010, I kind of had a change of heart for architecture and asked myself 'How can I build a golf

course that the average player can get through but is still a challenge to everyone?'

"The answer that I came up with was that you have to give people room to miss, so that they can find their ball and have some chance of recovery, and when they're having those recovery shots, they're probably trying to recover back to bogeys and double bogeys with the same ball.

"What we intended was to build a golf course that was wide and forgiving to the average golfer but ask for good golfers to pick tight lines and to make aggressive play," he admits.

"I'm a firm believer that by giving players some forgiveness for wayward errors I will encourage you to be more aggressive off the tee, and when you play aggressively you generally make a better stroke which ends up being a better result."

McLay-Kidd is reluctant to pick out any particular holes as his favourites although, when pushed, he selects the 13th hole, a short par-four played from an elevated tee, and the 18th, a wonderful picture-post-card par four that plays uphill to a cleverly designed putting surface that slopes from back to front.

One thing he has no doubts about, though, is the potential The Dunas Course possesses to become one of the game's modern-day great designs and to be a showcase venue for links golf in southern Europe that can be enjoyed by all players.

"The thing that is really great for me is that this is open to the public," said McLay-Kidd.

"I get to build courses but, more often than not, they are very, very private and no one gets to see them, so being able to build something like this that's so unique, so natural and is so willing to be open to any and all at a somewhat reasonable price – the price right now is less than courses in the Algarve – I'm hoping that this will fill with golfers quickly and be a showcase for links golf in southern Europe.

"Golfers will love coming here and the leap of faith that Vanguard Properties especially has made will pay off. Where others couldn't see the potential, they obviously did and I'm hoping that will come to pass over the next two or three years, when the course will have had time to mature and it will be in racing condition where it plays firm and fast." **END**





Words Pete Simm

Online jouer.golf

NATHANAËL PIETRZAK-SWIRC

DIRECTOR, UGOLF INTERNATIONAL

UGOLF

INTERNATIONAL

Driving Growth | On a Global Scale

There has been much talk about a 'golf boom' in the UK over the last few years, certainly since the Covid pandemic, with numerous studies reporting significant increases in participation numbers and the number of rounds played.

This has been welcome news for the industry, and it's encouraging too that growth is being witnessed in other parts of the world, as seen by UGOLF, Europe's largest – and the world's fifth largest – golf club management company.

UGOLF is a subsidiary of the Duval Group, a real estate development, management and investment firm which employs more than 5,000 people worldwide and recorded more than €1 billion in revenue in 2022.

Golfers might not be familiar with the name, but UGOLF's work behind the scenes is playing a significant role in boosting golf participation and introducing the game to people from all different demographics around the world.

'Growing the game' might be something of a buzzword, but not for UGOLF, whose mission statement is simple: 'Driving growth, on a global scale'. It is this ethos that is seeing UGOLF enjoy great success, with 20,000 new players introduced to the game in 2022 alone.

Together with its recently launched global division – UGOLF International – the company currently owns or manages an impressive 118 golf clubs worldwide. These include many venues in France, with others spread across Spain, Germany, Madagascar, New Caledonia, Egypt, French Polynesia and Rwanda.

In France, where UGOLF operates in excess of 100 clubs, the company has had a major impact on golf participation. According to the Fédération Française de Golf, 70 per cent of all new players in France were created by UGOLF in 2022, a figure that highlights the potential for growth in all corners of the world.

Nathanaël Pietrzak-Swirc is director of UGOLF International. After obtaining a golf management diploma and seven years' experience in the golf industry, he joined the company in 2014, before graduating as a certified club manager in 2018.

"UGOLF has been growing the game of golf in France for more than 40 years and is now a key figure in the French and European golf market," said Pietrzak-Swirc, who has served on the board of the French Golf Managers' Association, as well as being involved in the MCO association in Europe.

"Having spread our wings to Spain, Germany and beyond Europe, our aim is to take our unique formula for success to far reaches of the globe. We are excited for what the future holds as we enter a new era with the launch of UGOLF International."

In France, the UGOLF Academy provides a strong platform for beginners, called USWING Program, the benefits of which include unlimited collective lessons, a set of clubs and course access for an accessible price of €99 per month.

It is not the only initiative, but it's certainly proved one of the most effective in attracting a young audience, as well as those who previously would have viewed golf as unattainable.



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UGolf Avignon Chateaublanc is a success story well worth shining a light on. The club was launched in 1987 as a public-owned entity, but found itself losing approximately €100,000 a year with an average of 450 members.

UGOLF took over in 2009, and within three years it had become a profitable business with the club reaching 1,000 members. That number has now grown to 1,200 with 310 beginners in the USWING Program and 120 juniors in the golf school.

Numerous other positive case studies stand out, including in Spain, where UGOLF started to make its mark in 2019, with three courses in Murcia.

During the first year, rounds played were up by nine per cent. After the pandemic hit, the clubs were well equipped to deal with the surge in demand that came their way.

Despite international travel grinding to a halt, in 2021 these clubs boasted a 22 per cent growth in green fee traffic. A year later, 74 per cent growth, all of which came from a healthy mix of sources, including members, tour operations, residents and societies.

Perhaps one of the greatest success stories to date is Rwanda.

Kigali Golf Resort & Villas (pictured left) was opened in 2021, the country's first golf club, and UGOLF played a significant role in developing the site and consulting on the project with the local government owners.

Membership has grown from zero in the first year to over 500, with the local community fully engaged and onside with the club.

To get to this position, UGOLF implemented its 'USwing' program in the academy where, on top of the membership, students received a free golf bag and lessons, two of the biggest barriers that prevent new players getting into the sport.

A number of other initiatives have helped to encourage those in the local community, especially children, to try golf, including local outreach projects and a collaboration with PSG and Arsenal FC on youth activation.

Two local professionals now have full teaching agendas and are kept busy with a weekly group of 25 different school children,

who all get taken to Kigali to try the game for free. The club has become the heart of the community.

"Africa as a continent is a really interesting market, and we are pretty sure that it will grow and improve a lot in the next ten years," said Pietrzak-Swirc, who took charge of the company's international expansion in 2021.

"We can also see a great interest in pan-African golf tourism and have had a lot of exchanges with African countries."

UGOLF International is set to take its unique formula for success around the world from 2023. Over the next three years the company's aim is to break into the top three of the world's largest golf operators.

What works in one country, or one club, may not work at another. One of the strengths of UGOLF International's model is its adaptability – it is not a 'one size fits all' solution. Every club and market is assessed, which leads to a bespoke solution.

"It is our company policy to look at each opportunity on an individual basis, even if it might be strange for a French company to manage a UK golf club," explained Pietrzak-Swirc.

"We believe that, especially with our model of academies, we can bring something different. I even have a bet with one of our general managers who is Scottish that, within three years, we will manage a golf course in Scotland."

As for the future and the golf industry as a whole, Pietrzak-Swirc is positive about what lies ahead.

He added: "My feeling is that the golf industry is going to evolve into a much more professional structured world.

"If we do a parallel with the hotel industry, 50 years ago less than ten per cent of hotels were managed by professional companies. Nowadays, that figure is more than 65 per cent.

"In the golf industry, ten per cent of the 38,000-plus golf courses in the world are managed by golf operators so there is clearly a big potential to evolve and change." **END**

CLUBNET AND THE CAVERSHAM

ALIGN TO STREAMLINE CLUB OPERATIONS IN ONE PLATFORM



Gary Stangoe, the general manager of The Caversham, near Reading in Berkshire and his team recently embarked on a new stage of development for their club.

Their decision to choose ClubNet Systems for a streamlined and integrated club management system proves that innovation in the industry is very much alive and continuing to evolve to meet the needs of club managers and their teams.

Given the ever-growing demand for improved efficiency and user experience in the golf industry ClubNet Systems are seeing more and more clubs make the move to their platform.

When asked about this decision, Stangoe said: "As we enter a new phase of our development at The Caversham with the opening of a new clubhouse, we were delighted to be able to confirm that we have chosen to move our club management software to ClubNet Systems.

"The changeover to ClubNet from our previous provider went well, even though we chose to make the change mid-summer, at the same time as the opening of our new clubhouse.

"ClubNet's flexible and 'can do' attitude was very reassuring, and we look forward to working with the ClubNet team on the further personalisation of the ClubNet software to our requirements at The Caversham."

The Caversham are the first club in the UK to be using the entire Clubnet system. In less than a month since going live, 946 of their 1,100 members have downloaded the App and are using this to book their tee times, enter competitions, view results, check their

bar purse transactions, book a time slot in the Fitness Suite, book tickets for club functions and much more.

The Caversham have also moved to the integrated ClubNet EPOS, which allows for a more seamless experience for their members. With the rise of online spending, we are beginning to see the move away from traditional setups in favour of new user experiences to enhance club transactions.

Members feedback has shown they are in favour of being able to track their club purchases in real time while being able to top up their purse online for future club spend.

Leading the team at ClubNet Systems is CEO John Aherne (pictured) who said: "We are delighted to have The Caversham on-board as our first UK club to have opted to roll out our full platform.

"We know that it's a big decision for a club to move from all their software vendors into one platform, especially to one who is a new player in the UK market.

"But with three years of analytical data from our Irish launch – where we attained 30 per cent market share – we could show the management team at The Caversham that not only was there a 40 per cent cost saving, but by streamlining all club functions into one platform that we could offer huge time savings for staff across all branches of the club's operations."

ClubNet Systems provides advanced features to help clubs like The Caversham meet the demands of today's increasingly sophisticated and competitive club environments. From membership management to analytics and reporting, ClubNet Sys-





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tems offers a comprehensive suite of tools designed to make managing a club simpler and more efficient.

Plus, with regular updates on the latest features and technology advancements, ClubNet Systems ensures that your club is future proofed and well-equipped to benefit from the latest trends.

As clubs like The Caversham strive to meet the ever-growing and changing needs of their members, it's crucial that they turn to flexibility as a solution because a one-size-fits-all model simply doesn't work anymore.

Clubs need to focus on their individual needs and requests of members, which would ultimately ensure better performance and success.

ClubNet Systems are seeing a major shift in the way technology is used to manage clubs and organisations. Increasingly, they are offering bespoke options that will benefit The Caversham and in turn be offered to their growing network of clubs.

Keeping up-to-date with the latest technology can be a challenge for some clubs. That's why ClubNet Systems are committed to continuing to innovate and develop their system. With every upgrade, they work tirelessly to roll out new features and enhance user experiences for their client clubs.

They are continually evolving and working to make life easier for their users. With each new development, features improve and are tailored to meet their client's needs.

When working with the team at The Caversham they soon realised they required a more personalised tee booking system, so that their flexible members could book tee times and be charged six different rates, for golf at different times of the day and different days of the week.

They now have three periods of time midweek and three different periods of time at a weekend – peak, regular and off-peak, which each have different green fee prices.

Flexible members can book the tee times they want and the relevant fee is taken from their purse.

Their management dashboard allows the clubs admin team to access an overview of revenue generated and the performance of the business in chart and data formats while

their in-depth reporting modules allows for full transparency.

From their initial meeting with the team at The Caversham, support from the ClubNet Systems team was imperative when considering their move. Small teams are the backbone of many businesses, and having fewer people on a team allows for closer connections, greater collaboration, and a deeper understanding of the task at hand.

ClubNet Systems demonstrated that they can collaborate quickly and effectively, listen more closely to their customer needs, and create an intimate and personalised experience.

An example of this was when they built additional features into their Activity Management module, so that different prices can be charged to different categories of member for different events.

For example, The Caversham have a Fitness Suite within the clubhouse, which is free for full members to use and chargeable to other categories of members. There is also a limit as to how many people can use the Fitness Suite at one time, so the Activity Management system knows when no further bookings can be taken.

Over the coming weeks, they will be adding the ability of members to use the App to book into two treatment rooms, with specialists offering timed therapy sessions to treat injuries or to improve mobility, like physiotherapy and sports massage.

They will also be adding the ability for members to use the App to book lessons with one of the golf pro team, a custom fit appointment on the in-house simulator, book into group lessons and other services that the club provide.

Irish owned ClubNet Systems is an established software company who provide management systems for golf clubs. Their powerful software allows clubs to manage their operations more efficiently, streamline communication and provide an overall better experience for their members.

As technology continues to play an even more significant role in the game, the ability to offer club members an interactive and all-in-one interface is increasingly more important than ever. **END**

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"ARE WE GETTING THE BEST VALUE FROM THE PRO IF WE LOCK THEM IN THE SHOP SELLING MARS BARS AND GLOVES"



Words

David Withers
Managing Director
Iseki UK & Ireland

GUEST BOOK

DAVID WITHERS



Are you getting the best from your Pro?

All golf clubs have a professional golfer and members love to interact with the pro, but are we getting the best value from the pro if we lock them in the shop selling Mars bars and gloves.

I was a guest at a club recently and prior to my round, I was hitting some balls on the range – why it is easy to hit great drives on the range and then absolute rubbish when on the course!

The Pro wandered out of the Pro shop and spent a few minutes with each person on the range and gave a few tips to each one: Tuck your elbow in, finish your back swing and in my case give up golf!

He then went on to hit a few balls himself with a rather lovely £550 new driver that was recently launched, and was hitting some marvellous drives and making appreciative wow noises loud enough to get our attention and make sure we were watching his exhibition. The next step was to offer some of us rank amateurs the opportunity to try out this "Magic Wand" and amazingly it worked! I could hit a draw rather than a snap-hook and a fade rather than a savage slice.... I was cured!

Now only an idiot would buy a hugely expensive new club on the basis of a few swings and lucky shots, but luckily for this club I am an idiot... they are £550 richer, I am £550 poorer and the bloody "Magic Wand" has never worked properly again! **END**

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