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NUMBER 138 | SPRING 2022

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FAIR COMMENT

Readers of a certain age will remember Mr Magoo, a US cartoon character whose lack of 20/20 vision involved him in endless hilarious scrapes. I was left wondering whether he has resurfaced in Southern Europe recently after I learned of some very short-sighted decisions being made at a few golf resorts in Spain.

Without wishing to tempt fate, it would appear the Covid pandemic – which has devastated the globe during the last couple of years – is, if not in retreat, at least coming under control.

This has seen something of a welcome upsurge in golf tourism, which will, inevitably, prove a boon for the traditional markets on the Iberian Peninsula. What distresses me, however, is that some resorts appear to have lost sight of the fact there is a place for both a membership and an allocation of visitor tee-times.

Indeed, I know of one destination on the Costa Blanca that has dispensed entirely with its membership and will, instead, rely wholly on visitor golf for its on-course income. If the last few years have taught us anything – and such judgments make me wonder if they have – it's that we should not take anything for granted and to rely solely on visitor income is surely madness, when we have seen just how quickly travel plans can be disrupted.

I undertook a quick straw poll of my industry contacts and not one can see the merit in taking this step. If clubs had gone in this direction in 2019, their course would now, most likely, be earmarked for polytunnel development...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.eu.com/spring

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FEATURING

SPRING 2022



CÉSAR BURGUIÈRE
ANTOGNOLLA GOLF

"The course had no staff, restaurant, golf shop, no superintendent, golf professional and no outside service attendants. We quickly went through hiring all the associates and creating a team from nothing."

20



JULIÁN ROMAGUERA
LOS NARANJOS

"It took me six months to get this role in the end, so it was not something which happened all of a sudden. Obviously, I fully understand that probably they had, at the time, their doubts about hiring such a young person for this position."

26



DAVID SPENSER

FELIXSTOWE FERRY

"There has been some talk for the last 25–30 years that it would be nice if we got a new clubhouse, but it wasn't until I arrived and sat down with the board that we focused on the priorities for the golf club."

30



SARAH BLUNDEN

WYCOMBE HEIGHTS

"My initial reaction when I am asked about women in positions of power within the golf industry is one of anger, because I genuinely don't believe this should be an issue or talking point in 2022."

34



NICK SOLSKI

BOOMERS AND SWINGERS

"We've seen a much younger demographic and people you would never, ever see go to a traditional golf club: young people who probably thought golf was just a boring sport for old people."

42

"TORO HAS A WORLD-RENOWNED REPUTATION AS A SUPPLIER OF
HIGH-QUALITY EQUIPMENT AND SOLUTIONS"



COVER STORY

TORO.COM



The R&A has named The Toro Company as a Founding Partner and Official Golf Course Maintenance Partner for its planned community golf facility at Lethamhill in Glasgow, Scotland.

The development aims to make golf more accessible, appealing and inclusive for people of all ages and backgrounds by creating an open and affordable pathway into golf that helps drive the future of the sport.

At the heart of facility, The R&A is committed to showcasing the gold standard in golf course maintenance, turf care, equipment innovation and development, and to that end, they have selected Toro to join them in the development and fulfilment of their mission.

As part of this role, Toro will be the exclusive supplier of all course maintenance equipment to the new facility. Development is now underway for this new family-focused venue, which is to include a nine-hole course, putting greens, short game area, adventure golf and a driving range for visitors to enjoy a wide range of golf activities, including shorter forms of the sport.

In addition to providing an equipment fleet and irrigation products to the facility, Toro will have the first option to partner with The R&A on potential future developments.

Toro also plans to provide a grant to be used toward the development of a green-keeper apprenticeship, as well as for efforts that promote the global development of the game of golf.

"We are delighted to become a Founding Partner of this unique project," said Peter Moeller, vice president of international at The Toro Company.

"The R&A's commitment to developing the game of golf and making it accessible to the broadest possible community is very much in line with Toro's own mission and objectives.

"It is both humbling and exciting to see Toro's equipment and irrigation solutions advance The R&A's sustainability efforts, and we look forward to helping its team bring plans for the new facility to reality."

Martin Slumbers, chief executive of The R&A, added: "Toro has a world-renowned reputation as a supplier of high-quality equipment and solutions for golf course maintenance and so was a natural choice for us in selecting a partner for the new facility.

"We look forward to working alongside them in the development of the new venue and providing golfers with excellent facilities so that they can fully enjoy playing the sport in a variety of formats with family and friends."

Redevelopment of the existing golf course at Lethamhill is already underway with the new facility expected to open in the spring of 2023. Also being planned is the planting of a new community orchard, which will allow local residents and groups to grow and harvest a range of foods including fruits and vegetables. **END**

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IT'S NOT THE RIYAL DEAL

My social media timelines are – at the time of writing – full of the latest shenanigans surrounding the 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour'. And when I say 'social media timelines' I mean Twitter. I'm about to turn 59; I don't have the energy to engage with any other social media.

I was delighted to learn that two 'leading PGA pros' had opted not to join the now notorious (see columns passim) 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour', as it's not putting too fine a point on it to say I'd like to see it (the 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour') fall flat on its expensively formed face.

Whether or not their equipment sponsors had a quiet word in the ear of Dustin Johnson and Bryson DeChambeau – for it was they who rejected the riyal deal – is not known, though you can speculate. I wouldn't, obviously, but you can...

What may have surprised some was that DeChambeau has shown he can make a decision relatively quickly.

I'm not the only one, of course, to oppose the 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour' – thankfully, there has been much opprobrium thrown in its general direction from several quarters. I should clarify, I'm not against professional golfers earning a decent crust, only that they shouldn't accept blood money from a country with a human rights' record akin to that of Jack the Ripper. I jest, of course. The Saudi human rights record is far worse.

Yet, if there was one person you can guarantee would misread the prevailing wind of public opinion, it's 'The Donald', a man so impervious to bad press that he actively encourages it. My Twitter timeline also tells me that the Trump Organization is in talks to host events from the 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour' at Turnberry and Trump International Golf Links, in Scotland, and Trump National Golf Course, Los Angeles.

Turnberry, you will recall was removed from the Open roster following the storming of the US Capitol building last year by Trump supporters – I like to think of them as Trumpers, for some reason – an action that, ironically, had it been carried out in Saudi Arabia, would most likely have seen the protagonists lose an extremity or three.

Then again, why should I imagine Trump would put human decency and integrity ahead of filthy lucre. It would be a break from everything he and his followers have been advocating for years.

Another ironic twist in this seditious soap opera is provided by the presence of legend Greg Norman as the CEO of LIV Golf Investments, which is behind the 'Saudi-backed breakaway tour'. Who could have imagined that a 'Shark' would be involved in such a plan?

As you may have guessed, I wish him, and everybody at LIV Golf Investments, the very best of luck with their new venture. May they live in interesting times. **END**

NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.EU.COM/NEWS



59CLUB KEEPS ON GIVING WITH EXCLUSIVE GOLF MANAGEMENT OFFER

59club, the leading sales and service analysts and training provider, has an exclusive offer for all Golf Management readers to receive a six-month FREE membership to its management development program, 'Succession'. The initiative is open to all managers, their deputies, and other rising stars within their business, whether or not they work with 59club. Succession is designed to support individuals to reach their full potential within their current role, while expanding learning opportunities, career progression and personal growth.

SEARCH 'SUCCESSION' ONLINE

at golfsmanagement.eu.com for the full story



EUROPEAN GOLF DESIGN CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY

European Golf Design, one of the world's foremost golf course design agencies, this week celebrates its 30th anniversary. Founded in 1992 as a joint venture between the European Tour group and IMG, European Golf Design (EGD) is responsible for 105 projects globally including three Ryder Cup venues: The Twenty Ten Course at The Celtic Manor Resort, host of the 2010 Ryder Cup; the redesign at Le Golf National, host of the 2018 Ryder Cup; and the redesign of the stadium course at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, which will host golf's greatest team competition in less than 18 months' time.

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Andy Gordon

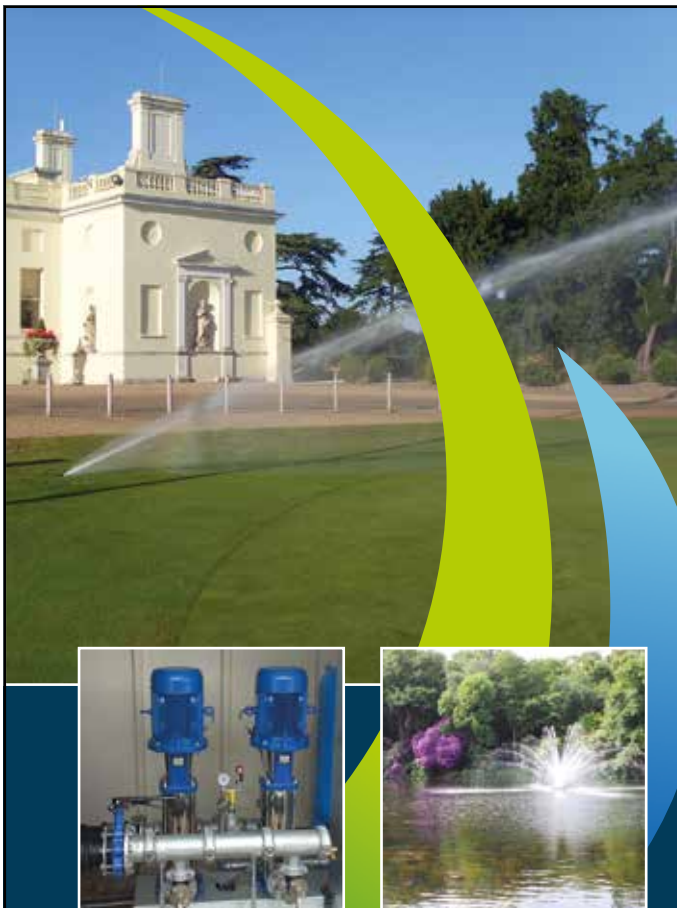
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3 HAMMERS GOLF COMPLEX TWINS WITH UGANDA'S AFRIYEA ACADEMY

3 Hammers Golf Complex has created a Twinning project with East and Central Africa's number one golf academy AFRIYEA. By working collaboratively 3 Hammers and AFRIYEA will exchange ideas and expertise, create fun experiences for the youngsters at both venues with a long-term ambition to create a partnership that will help AFRIYEA achieve its goals in the region.

SEARCH 'AFRIYEA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



CLEARWATER WASHPAD WATER RECYCLING SYSTEM GAINING MOMENTUM

The ClearWater division of Acumen Waste Services Ltd has reported a surge in enquiries following the peak of Covid-19, with general manager, Matthew Mears stating: "Environmental concerns are still high on everyone's agenda and despite Covid, we've continued receiving enquiries and have carried out installations when permissible."

SEARCH 'CLEARWATER' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



NEW LINKS COURSE LEADS LA HACIENDA'S AMBITIOUS TRANSFORMATION

Spain's La Hacienda Alcaidesa Links Golf Resort, formerly known as Alcaidesa, will begin its elevation to a luxury golf destination this summer with the reopening of its redesigned Links course. Millenium Hospitality, a company which specialises in the luxury hotel sector across Spain and Portugal, is overseeing a multi-million euro investment which will put La Hacienda on the map as a flagship 36-hole golf resort in southern Europe.

SEARCH 'ALCAIDESA' ONLINE

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Dedicated coaches mixed engaging challenges with inspirational, thought-provoking discussions during the love.golf annual conference held at the Park Plaza Hotel in Leeds. The ever-growing love.golf programme is delivered by a passionate community of coaches in the UK, Canada, Spain, Panama and United Arab Emirates, and is a group golf programme exclusively for women, replacing traditional instruction with the freedom to explore new skills, discover untapped potential and bond with a supportive group of like-minded women.

SEARCH 'LOVE.GOLF' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



GOLF GENIUS HELPING CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS IN NEW SOFTWARE ERA

Golf Genius Software has reported continued success throughout 2021, facilitating the new digital golf environment by delivering innovative technology and exceptional experiences for clubs, tours and associations. In the past 12 months, the company has powered 30 million rounds in 62 countries worldwide while accelerating growth with key partnerships and acquisitions.

SEARCH 'GOLF GENIUS' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



CAMPEY GOES BIG FOR BTME 2022 WITH EXTENDED PRODUCT RANGE

For the first time, Campey Turf Care Systems will be showcasing models from nine product ranges at BTME 2022. The exhibition in Harrogate is one of the most popular events in the greenkeeping calendar, attracting turf professionals from across the world, and in March, attendees will see over 15 Campey machines in one place with equipment covering everything from renovations and aeration to overseeding and utility vehicles.

SEARCH 'CAMPEY TURF CARE' ONLINE

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THE GROVE AWARDED GEO CERTIFIED STATUS

The Grove, Hertfordshire's country escape, has been awarded GEO Certified status, for commitment and efforts to achieve the credible international standard for sustainable golf course operation. GEO Certification is assured by GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf, with the not-for-profit organisation dedicated to delivering programmes that help people on the ground to evaluate, improve and credibly communicate their sustainability work.

SEARCH 'THE GROVE' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



POWAKADDY FX3 UNVEILED AS UK'S BEST-SELLING ELECTRIC GOLF TROLLEY

One of the world's leading electric trolley brands, Powakaddy, has announced that its FX3 trolley has been named as the UK's best selling trolley in 2021 for the second year in a row, according to the latest figures from Golf Datatech. The FX3's features provide the DNA for the entire FX range, and are wonderfully simple whilst offering unbeatable performance and reliability. The entry-level model features a 2.3" full-colour widescreen display, and powerful, quiet 30v 230w motor nestling in a low profile, styled PowaFrame.

SEARCH 'POWAKADDY ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



SYNGENTA APPOINT NEW UK TECHNICAL MANAGER FOR PROFESSIONAL SOLUTIONS

Sean Loakes has been appointed as Syngenta professional solutions technical manager for the UK and Ireland. Loakes expands the existing Syngenta technical and business team, to offer further specialist trials expertise and developing new integrated solutions for turf, landscape, ornamentals production and pest control. Loakes's role is dedicated to customers in UK and Ireland, and will also support the continued work of Glenn Kirby, who now has the extended responsibility as technical manager for turf & landscape across Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

SEARCH 'SEAN LOAKES' ONLINE

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CUSTOMISED CLUB CAR'S DRIVING MODERN APPROACH AT ASTBURY

The Astbury Golf Club has taken delivery of a new fleet of tailored vehicles, as it extends its partnership with Club Car, one of the world's largest manufacturers of small-wheel electric vehicles. The dozen electric Tempo cars, each fitted with a long-lasting Lithium battery, have been designed to fit with The Astbury's approach to host the modern golfer. With several accessories fitted, including dual mobile phone charging points, the vehicles are a mix of industry-leading durability and premium comfort.

SEARCH 'ASTBURY' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



TOPGOLF REVEALS PLANS FOR STATE-OF-THE-ART GLASGOW VENUE

Topgolf Entertainment Group yesterday confirmed it is targeting a late 2022 opening for its new state-of-the-art venue in Glasgow. This venue will be the first to introduce Topgolf's signature, technology-enabled experience to Scotland, and will be home to Topgolf's fourth UK site, adding to a list of over 70 venues operating in six countries, which attract over 30 million players per year combined. Construction has been progressing well at the future Topgolf Glasgow venue, with property company Ashfield Land leading the development.

SEARCH 'TOPGOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



ST MELLION ESTATE BEGINS £2M HOLIDAY COTTAGE COLLECTION REDEVELOPMENT

Formerly known as St. Mellion International Resort, the golf destination located in Cornwall, underwent a strategic rebrand in 2020, with a focus on broadening its appeal to the developing golf market that emerged as a result of the pandemic. With not only a first-rate golf course on offer, but also the highly rated Kernow Course and extensive accommodation and leisure facilities, the name 'St. Mellion Estate' materialised.

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CÉSAR BURGUIÈRE

GOLF DIRECTOR, ANTOGNOLLA GOLF



ANTOGNOLLA GOLF

Frank Smith, the famous Canadian psycholinguist once wrote: "One language sets you in a corridor of life. Two languages open every door along the way."

Smith's quotation could have been written with César Burguière in mind. A 42-year-old native French speaker, Burguière is fluent in English and Spanish, and thanks to his latest role as golf director at Antognolla Resort and Residences in Italy, can now add Italian to this list.

Yet, it was his love of golf – not language – that ultimately saw Burguière land a role with Troon but not before trying his hand as a young teaching pro as he explains: "I started working as a golf pro, teaching when I was younger, and that was during my university years [in Valencia]. Following this I started working in golf retail.

"When I stopped teaching, I was in the middle of my studies, so I took a year off to travel around the world, and then I came back and I finished my degree, at which point I started working at a golf store called Golf USA."

Burguière progressed to operations manager in charge of five stores in the region of Valencia in Spain but decided he wanted to broaden his education further still despite holding a business degree obtained at the University of Valencia.

"Following my experience working with Golf USA, I completed a postgraduate programme at Les Roches Marbella International School of Hotel Management," explained Burguière, "and this is where I met the sales and marketing director of Troon Europe, Damian Murphy."

At the time, Troon were working in Morocco with the Doha group, and required a French-speaking retail manager to assist with one of their properties.

With his experience working in golf retail, Burguière was the ideal candidate and subsequently spent just over a year in North Africa before relocating to Troon's international office in Geneva as office manager. His language skills were to prove invaluable to Troon.

"Because of Vision 2020 I went to Morocco and as a French speaker I was able to assist with the development the company intended to have there. I also went to France, and Spain, where I did some consulting.

"I also assisted with budgets and retail agreements at the same time as I was taking care of a variety of office tasks."

In April 2011, the position of golf operations manager at Costa Navarino in Greece became available, and Burguière spent 18 months at the 36-hole destination in Messinia before accepting the role of director of golf at Lumine Golf and Beach in Tarragona, Spain.

Working alongside general manager Calle Carlsson, Burguière learnt from one of the best in the business, before deciding it was time to look for a new challenge away from the Costa Dorada.

"I was looking to make a move and considering what opportunities I had," he recalls. "What I wanted was a really great project, as I wanted to grow my career, and that is exactly what I've done by coming here... I made a great step forward."





"AT THAT TIME THE GOLF COURSE WAS IN VERY POOR CONDITION AND IT NEEDED SERIOUS INVESTMENT"

What Burguière refers to as "here" is Antognolla Golf Resort and Residences in Umbria, Italy.

Designed by Robert Trent Jones II and originally opened for play in 1997, Burguière has been influential in transforming the resort since arriving in November 2017. As he explains: "At that time the golf course was in very poor condition and it needed serious investment to place it where the owners wanted it to be.

"I remember when landing in November the golf course was not draining at all, and players were coming back to the clubhouse with their trousers ruined.

"Antognolla had limited visitors in winter because you couldn't play as the course wasn't draining – the bunkers were just big holes where water was accumulating.

"The course had no staff, restaurant, golf shop, no superintendent, golf professional and no outside service attendants. We quickly went through hiring all the associates and creating a team from nothing.

"Even though we were not starting from zero, at times it certainly felt like we were."

The scale of the task facing Burguière may have seen lesser individuals running for the hills, or the nearest airport, but as his first senior position in golf – reporting directly to the owners – the Frenchman rose to the challenge and began to plan a way forward.

"It was actually good for me," he recalls, "because there were new things here that I could influence, plus I had a role where I was directly in contact with the owners and the board, which I had never had before."

Burguière spent his first winter in Umbria fully assessing the course and made immediate plans – all backed by the owners – to re-build every bunker, create a new network of drainage, upgrade the irrigation system, and construct a new driving range.

"The owners had limited golf expertise and they needed someone to help drive them through the process," added Burguière. "We also had consultants like Braemar Golf and Robert Trent Jones II so it was a great team to work with."

With the golf course now at a standard which Burguière is content with, he has

switched his focus to plans for a new clubhouse and maintenance facility.

"The clubhouse has been designed to be very efficient operationally, as we were involved with the architects during the development stages," he states.

"At other facilities it is quite usual to see reduced operational efficiencies in the clubhouse, as there is no golf expertise involved during the design stages.

"This is not the case here and I have been very happy to have a say on these important aspects."

Burguière has also been involved on the culinary side of the operation and has been actively engaged in creating the restaurant on-site, which as a Frenchman has delighted him.

"Building up a restaurant in Italy has been very exciting as Italian cuisine is internationally recognised, and who does not like a wood-fired pizza! We've started literally from zero, hiring all the staff, and creating a concept to go in accordance with the golf strategy – it's been really fun!"

It is evident talking with Burguière that he has invested sweat and tears into the project at Antognolla. The long-term vision for the resort is well aligned with his goal for a high-end facility nestled in the foothills of Umbria.

He is also acutely aware that there remains room for improvement stating: "It's true that we're not finished with infrastructure or with the facilities, but our main focus remains always on maintaining a high level of service as we understand this is a fundamental foundation to ensuring repeat business.

"We are working exceptionally hard to provide a service that is above any standard in Italy."

Burguière has yet to finish 'Project Antognolla' but when the time comes to move on, he would like to return to Spain one day where his wife was born. "I have just become a dad," he says with pride, "so we would like to see ourselves in Spain, that's for sure."

And fluent in Spanish, it's only a matter of time before another door opens for the affable Frenchman. **END**





NEW DESTINATION

WORLDCLASS.GOLF



Los Naranjos in Marbella has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf, a portfolio of the world's premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

Opened in 1977, Los Naranjos belongs to a select group of golf courses on the Costa del Sol that were designed by Robert Trent Jones, and was originally an orange tree plantation, from where the club takes its name.

Los Naranjos has hosted numerous high-profile professional and amateur tournaments over the years – including the 1989 Spanish PGA Championship, which was won by Jose Rivero after beating Spanish legend Severiano Ballesteros in a play-off.

Last year, the club hosted the Andalucía Costa del Sol Open de España, the culmination for the Race to Costa del Sol on the Ladies European Tour's Order of Merit.

Commenting on their addition to the 2022 portfolio, worldclass.golf CEO, Michael Lenihan said: "After visiting Los Naranjos in January, I was struck by the history together with the very special and relaxed atmosphere that appears to flow throughout the club.

"Upon arrival, guests are greeted by the CaddieMaster and all facilities at the club, including the full use of the practice range and changing rooms, plus shoe cleaning and locker storage are fully available, with all visitors encouraged to make themselves at home. There is even an on-site Barber's shop for any visitors in need of a pre-round hair cut!"

With international golf travel resuming following the aftermath of the pandemic, Los Naranjos is the first of many destinations set to join worldclass.golf in 2022. **END**



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Words Michael Lenihan
Photography Eduardo Vinas, Jacob Sjöman

JULIÁN ROMAGUERA

GENERAL MANAGER, LOS NARANJOS



When Julián Romaguera Googled 'golf jobs in Asia' as an ambitious young golf professional, little did he appreciate that his career would take him on his own personal world golf tour.

Growing-up on the Costa del Sol in Spain, Romaguera, like many of his peers within the industry today, fancied his chances as a budding tour professional, competing week-in, week-out on the world's best golf courses.

His ambition took him to the US where he secured a golf scholarship at Orlando Webber International University – which is where Romaguera gained a degree in business management – but he quickly realised that if he wanted a career in golf, it needed to be away from playing the game he openly admits he loves.

During his time in Orlando, realisation dawned that he just wouldn't make the grade as a tour pro saying: "I realised that although I was a good golfer, I was not good enough to play on the Tour." So, after finishing his degree in Orlando, Romaguera returned to Spain where he worked for a year or so in golf retail before his ambitious nature left him wanting more.

"I really enjoyed the experience," recalls Romaguera, "but after a year I noticed that this was probably not what I was meant to do. So, I started searching on the Internet for 'golf jobs in Asia' and admits: "I was very young, but very eager to do new things and learn a lot from different cultures."

During Romaguera's Internet search, an opportunity to run golf academies for children in Singapore was advertised, and soon, Romaguera was en-route to a new life

in Singapore working as a golf manager for Kindergolf who specialised in imparting golf, mental and life skills to 2–7 years old.

"Little-by-little, I fell in love more with managing within the golf industry and [shortly after arriving in Asia] was selected to be the operations manager at Blue Canyon Country Club in Phuket, Thailand, which was my first real experience working at a golf club."

Romaguera spent 18 months in Thailand, followed by another year-and-a-half as director of golf at Phokeethra Country Club in Cambodia, employed by Sofitel, where he briefly flirted with the idea of changing career paths into hotel management.

"I was living in the hotel and the company were very honest with me saying that as Sofitel had only two golf courses in the world, my career progression with them could not be through golf, and as such, I needed to train in hospitality management which I was happy to do.

"I was obviously managing the golf course, but for example, if there were some night shifts at the hotel, I would help out, or if the rest of the managers need to go on training or something else, I was the one in charge for that period.

"So, it gave me plenty of skills, and I also got to understand the running of hotels as well. Looking back, my time in Cambodia was the most rewarding, because I learned so much in a relatively short time."

Eager to progress his skill set further, in November 2014, Romaguera left Asia to head for Central America, and another 18-month spell, this time at Riviera Maya Golf in Cancun, Mexico.



"IT TOOK ME SIX MONTHS TO GET THIS ROLE IN THE END, SO IT WAS NOT SOMETHING WHICH HAPPENED ALL OF A SUDDEN"

"I loved my time in Cambodia, but there comes a point when you're looking for something else, and the Gulf is where I felt more comfortable. So, I moved to Mexico."

Now PGA Riviera Maya Golf, Romaguera recalls the destination being "a hidden gem in Mexico because the property is amazing... the golf course is stunning."

Managing a golf club within such a huge resort with 3,600 hotel rooms often proved challenging, with Romaguera admitting: "For many, many years, they did not take golf as a business seriously compared to the whole resort, so part of my job was to try and give it some importance."

Romaguera may well have stayed longer in Mexico, yet the pull of home – not to mention a beautiful woman who is now his wife – proved too much, and in April 2016, Romaguera returned to the Costa del Sol to start a new chapter in his personal and professional life, securing the position of general manager at Los Naranjos.

"I was on holidays here from Mexico, and she was living in Madrid and was also on holiday here as well, and we met by accident," recalls Romaguera fondly. "We're expecting our first child this year which is fantastic."

Aged just 29 at the time, some within the industry may have been daunted by the task of managing such a prestigious club at such a tender age, but not Romaguera.

"I took the role with a lot of responsibility. I knew that many people in the industry probably would not take me serious because of my youth, but obviously to me [that] was a challenge. I had always been very brave in that aspect. I'm a push forward guy."

And it was his tenacity and determination that landed the role, a position that wasn't even advertised. "There was no position officially... someone passed me the contact details of the president and I just sent him an email and our conversation started there."

"It took me six months to get this role in the end, so it was not something which happened all of a sudden. Obviously, I fully understand that probably they had, at the time, their doubts about hiring such a young person for this position."

Located in Marbella, Los Naranjos has undergone something of a revolution under Romaguera's stewardship, increasing their market share of online bookings exponentially over the past four-and-a-half years.

"Traditionally golf clubs have been working a lot with Tour operators, and now Los Naranjos can say that we are very independent ourselves because we sell straight through our website, whereas before it was pretty much only Tour operators selling."

"When I joined, I presented a vision to the owners. They understood that we were on the same line, but I also understood that there had been some changes in the ownership and that a younger generation of owners would understand that being young was something positive."

Six years on, now aged 35, Romaguera can reflect on his achievements at Los Naranjos, and is thankful for the faith that the owners showed in him.

"In some things I have matured over the time," admits Romaguera. "I would say myself and my management and my vision has become much more mature in this project because I have much more freedom to do things that I couldn't do earlier in other projects."

"I think all my experiences before allowed me to have the right tools to achieve how I would like the club here to evolve. I like to call it the DNA of Los Naranjos, and that goes from the very beginning from the kind of people we hire, and the traits that they have, to regular training and meetings."

Romaguera was also instrumental in securing the rights to host the Ladies Open of Spain last November – the final event in the Race to Costa del Sol – and harbours dreams of one day hosting, or working even, at a major Tour event venue.

"I think Los Naranjos was originally designed and built for tournaments, and unfortunately for different reasons had been 33 years without one," he said.

"It was my vision to bring a Tour event to the board, and obviously the TV exposure was fantastic – having some of the best girls in the world here was great. Plus, by hosting the Race to Costa del Sol, I have seen the best of each of my staff. I feel very proud about that."

And when asked about his own future, Romaguera candidly says: "I'll tell you the same thing I told my wife the first day I met her. My dream at some point is to be the CEO of a project that has hotel, real estate, and golf."

The only unanswered question is where in the world one day that will be. **END**

DAVID SPENSER

GENERAL MANAGER, FELIXSTOWE FERRY



When David Spenser joined Felixstowe Ferry Golf Club as general manager five years ago, little did he appreciate that he would be responsible for arguably the biggest change in the club's 142-year history.

Established in 1880, Felixstowe Ferry is one of the oldest golf clubs in England and one of only 246 true links courses in the world.

Situated in Suffolk on the east coast of England, the course runs alongside the North Sea and features 27 holes of golf – 18 played on the Martello Course, and nine over the Kingsfleet Course.

In recent years, the club has invested heavily in both courses as well as a new practice facility, and was recognised in 2018 as England Golf's Championship Venue of the Year. But off the course, not everything was quite as rosy, with the clubhouse – battered by the North Sea for decades – in urgent need of repair.

And as a member of the club, and with a background in finance gained working for global shipping company Maersk, Spenser put himself forward for the GM role at the club when the position became available.

"Many people used to call me the company doctor, well maybe not the company doctor but the trouble-shooter," he said, discussing his time at Maersk. "I referred to myself more of a dustman clearing up other people's mess," he laughs.

"If a part of the business had got into a bit of distress for whatever reason, and needed a little bit of guidance or help, that was the role which I had. I only managed to play golf when I came back to Felixstowe and was playing three times a month at most.

"I parted company with Maersk on very good terms, and my wife and I decided that we wanted to go travelling and towards the end [of our travels] this role became available. I only live across the road and thought that I could do that for a couple of years and maybe finally sort out the clubhouse that everyone had been moaning about for so many years."

Although not employed by the board to focus solely on the clubhouse, it soon became apparent that this would be Spenser's primary objective, which would define his tenure as general manager.

"The clubhouse was built in 1845 and was in urgent need of repair with a new roof costing more than £1 million, so we knew we had to do something.

"There has been some talk for the last 25-30 years that it would be nice if we got a new clubhouse, but it wasn't until I arrived and sat down with the board that we focused on the priorities for the golf club.

"They were extremely happy with the course; they were extremely happy with the nine-hole over the other side, but the clubhouse stuck out like a sore thumb. So that was the catalyst really."

As Felixstowe Ferry sits in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Spenser already knew that in terms of raising finance for the project it would prove sensitive, but with the membership in favour of a new clubhouse – rather than refurbishing the existing site – he began looking at options to raise the required funding.

The idea of building housing on the club's car park to raise funds for a new clubhouse





"THE HOUSING ELEMENT ACTUALLY HAD BEEN SPOKEN ABOUT BEFORE, BUT PEOPLE SAID YOU'D NEVER GET IT THROUGH PLANNING"

had been suggested before, but given the club's proximity to the shoreline, and the fact that it sits in an AONB, Spenser knew that he would almost certainly need to turn to the membership for the requisite funding.

"The housing element actually had been spoken about before, but people said you'd never get it through planning. That's when I spoke to a property lawyer who said, 'I don't think you'll get it', but I was determined to give it a try, and was introduced to a planning consultant... that was my drive to go and ask the question."

Prior to Spenser joining as general manager, there had been several years of declining membership and staff cuts, with the club at risk of potentially closing if the status quo remained. So, with the assistance of the planning consultant, Spenser set about not only trying to resolve the long-burning issue of the clubhouse, but potentially the future of the club.

"We met with the local authority, and said, 'Look, we're in trouble and need to do something with the clubhouse. We know we're in a sensitive area, so what do you suggest?' And to Spenser's astonishment, he was advised: 'If you can get the AONB, not necessarily to support it, but not to object against it, then the council will support it as well.'"

This was a watershed moment for Felixstowe Ferry as Spenser recalls: "The last thing they wanted was to see the golf club go to the wall. So, I invited the planning officer down from the AONB and that's when I heard about a concept I've not heard of before – landscape-led design – which is housing specifically designed to fit into the natural environment.

"The view here is all about the AONB. It's the wild-living grasses; it's the shingle; it's the big open space over the estuary. That's what characterises this as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and why we were informed that any housing had to be sensitive and had to be built properly."

And with the AONB on-side, planning permission was obtained from East Suffolk Council conditional on the proceeds from the housing being used to finance the cost of the new clubhouse.

Named Balfour Place, after Lord Balfour a former British Prime Minister who was also captain of Felixstowe Ferry in 1889, the

development of five select properties range in price from £1.25 – £1.85 million, all named after historical characters within golf.

"The idea was to give the houses a little bit of a unique selling point, so that you can trace the name of your house [back] to the origins of golf in England."

All five properties – three of which are now reserved – are contemporary in design, and in certain characteristics, echo the design of the new clubhouse which will have a low, natural green living roof.

"We've got the tradition [of the old clubhouse] where we've got all of the honour boards which then needs to blend in with a contemporary building which is going to be a challenge," admits Spenser.

Construction of the houses and the new clubhouse – which will be located closer to the shoreline – is due to commence this summer, with completion scheduled for 2023. The existing clubhouse will remain in use until the handover, before being demolished to make way for an overflow car park.

The club commissioned Wincer Lievenaar Architects to design the new clubhouse which will provide new public facilities, including a public putting green and café. "We will still retain the exclusivity of the members' lounge and changing rooms on one side of the building," states Spenser, "with the new public facilities on the other side which we see as a real benefit.

"You get this image of private members golf clubs and we have never really felt like that – we want to break down those barriers."

With planning permission and the long-term future of the club secured, Spenser is determined to see the project through, whilst looking to his replacement. "We're talking about a succession plan as I wasn't intending to be here this long," he admits.

"I'll be 65 in June and I'm looking to see the project out. But, at the same time, I'm looking to recruit my successor here, and we're out on the market looking for a general manager who can really make a career out of it."

Whoever replaces Spenser, the new incumbent should be grateful for his fortitude, as without it, there may well have been no golf club – yet alone a career – for anyone in Felixstowe. **END**





SARAH BLUNDEN

GENERAL MANAGER, WYCOMBE HEIGHTS

WYCOMBE HEIGHTS

*Events • **Golf** • Family*

Located in Buckinghamshire, Wycombe Heights Golf Centre is one of ten golf clubs in the UK owned and operated by Burhill Group Limited (BGL). And with a master's degree in psychology, the club's general manager, Sarah Blunden, has probably one of the most interesting career paths in golf management today.

"My journey at BGL actually started completely by accident, back in June 2006 when I was a student at Plymouth University," she recalls.

"One summer, while travelling back home for the holidays, I drove past Wycombe Heights, which was quite local to my family, so I decided to try out for a summer job there. Fortunately, I was offered the job, so I took a role working in the bar until it was time for me to go back to university.

"I finished university in the summer of 2008 having studied psychology, and gained a further master's degree in the subject. At that time, my career path was very much pointing towards mental health and exploring neuropsychology.

"However, the recession then took hold and finding work became increasingly difficult. The number of openings in the NHS to gain the level of experience I required to progress on that career path were severely limited, so I had to look at other options."

Throughout her time at university, Blunden continued to work various roles at Wycombe Heights, developing relationships with members, visitors, and staff at the club.

Her first step towards management came in the form of a transition into the admin side of the business at the club.

"After spending some time working behind the bar, I made a move into the office to work in an administration role," she said.

"From there, I gained lots of experience into the inner workings of the club and was eventually offered the chance to move into the role of membership manager, a position that meant I oversaw all the membership renewals and administration surrounding club memberships.

"I suppose during that time, I realised that I was growing increasingly fond of Wycombe Heights and working under the BGL umbrella. We had left the recession behind, so I no longer had that to blame for not pursuing a psychology career.

"Despite gaining my master's degree and gaining a bit of experience within the field, I just didn't want to change what I was doing, and every time I had thought about a change in career path another opportunity arose for me to progress with BGL."

After spending four years as membership manager at Wycombe Heights, Blunden was presented with the opportunity to take part in a wider management training programme with BGL, with the goal of developing the next generation of general managers within the company.

The programme involved various training elements and large segments of shadow work at particular BGL venues, including Birchwood Park in Kent, where she oversaw a large-scale renovation to the club's swimming pool and gym as deputy general manager. She also spent time working at BGL's flagship venue, Burhill Golf Club, and Hoebridge Golf Centre in Surrey.



"MY INITIAL REACTION WHEN I AM ASKED ABOUT WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER WITHIN THE GOLF INDUSTRY IS ONE OF ANGER"

"Taking part in the management training programme was extremely beneficial to my personal development," she admits. "I had the chance to work alongside existing general managers at numerous BGL sites, which gave me a great amount of exposure to the varying demands at different golf clubs.

"I was given the opportunity to learn about all the elements required to be an effective general manager within a safe environment, while working with fantastic teams of people throughout.

"Once I had reached the end of my training period, I found myself in a position where I was hungry to start the next part of my journey at BGL as a general manager. It was then, that the perfect role for me became available... general manager at Wycombe Heights Golf Centre, and I've been there ever since.

"I think it's fair to say that I have developed and grown a lot, from the person that I was straight after finishing my training programme. You learn new skills and how to adapt within the workplace, while developing your own methods to effectively manage your venue.

"I've also grown massively in confidence, mostly because each day when I come to work, I know that I have a team around me that is also committed to making a success of the club. One of the most important things that we have tried to instil around the club is a friendly, welcoming, and inclusive environment – a new type of culture that can be adopted and enjoyed by everybody.

"We want members and visitors to cherish the time they spend at Wycombe Heights, and by developing an appealing culture we feel that we are taking a positive step towards improving the overall experience at the club.

"Changing the culture of a golf club takes time – we know that – as the team has to buy into what you are trying to do. Luckily for me, my team has been a positive driving force in creating the environment that we want for our members.

"It was an amazing opportunity for me to come back to a club that I know so well, when taking on my first general manager role within the group.

Aged 35, Blunden forged her path to the GM role at Wycombe Heights through years of working various roles within the club, and by making the most of opportunities presented to her by her employer, BGL.

However, to this day, there still appears to be a lack of women in general management positions within the golf industry, a subject which she passionately believes needs addressing.

"My initial reaction when I am asked about women in positions of power within the golf industry is one of anger, because I genuinely don't believe this should be an issue or talking point in 2022. It is frustrating that we even have to have these conversations.

"However, I think the fact that it does still anger me is a big indicator that it is something we should be discussing. It is important to note though, there are some really great initiatives out there for women who want to get into the golf industry.

"The GCMA, for example, run a Women's Golf Leadership Group, which is a great platform to develop the skills required to move into a management position within golf. It's also fair to say that there are a lot more women seemingly moving into great positions within golf.

"I guess it's not just about women being in those positions, but about them being more visible when in those positions. Better networking would be a great way for female leaders to help each other become more visible and understand that it is not just a male-dominated industry anymore.

"Golf is a fantastic business to work in, especially as a general manager. It is becoming increasingly diverse and provides new opportunities around every corner – I'd encourage anybody to be a part of it.

"Across the BGL Golf portfolio, we have three female managers within a total of ten golf and country clubs. I have to say that within the company that I work for, opportunities are available for everybody, and I have never felt that there has been a male dominance.

"BGL is a very progressive company that likes to develop its own people and present them with opportunities to further their careers, and I love being a part of that." **END**

COSTA NAVARINO, GREECE

COSTANAVARINO.COM

Words Pete Simm

Photography Christos Drazos

A history and culture dating back thousands of years, mouth-watering gastronomy, breath-taking landscapes, miles of sandy beaches and endless sunny skies, there are so many things to recommend on a holiday to Greece.

The seemingly limitless array of attractions has made this particular part of Europe a popular choice for so many travellers over the last five decades.

Golf has been added to that list in recent years, with a growing number of players choosing to head to Greece to discover the outstanding golf and lifestyle experiences that can be enjoyed on and off the fairways.

At the forefront of the country's golf tourism drive has been Costa Navarino, with the venue's combination of signature 18-hole golf courses, five-star accommodation and numerous other leisure and amenities proving increasingly irresistible to resist for players from all over the continent.

And the Mediterranean's prime sustainable destination has raised the bar to new heights this spring with the official opening of Costa Navarino's new 36-hole Navarino Hills golf development.

The world's first International Olympic Academy Golf Course and the neighbouring Hills Course were unveiled to the golfing world last month alongside the new Hills Clubhouse – marking a new era for the venue and the arrival of Europe's newest golf destination.

Designed by two-time Masters champion José María Olazábal, the two layouts provide the ideal complement to Costa Navarino's two existing signature golf courses – The Dunes Course (designed by Bernhard Langer in association with European Golf Design) and The Bay Course (created by Robert Trent Jones II).

Costa Navarino's guests can now enjoy the challenge of four signature golf courses within a 13km maximum distance.

Olazábal said: "Costa Navarino is already well known around the world but what the two new courses will do is to lift Costa Navarino from the status of a golf resort to being a full golf destination.

"With four golf courses, Costa Navarino will appeal to the global golf-travel market and I'm sure will be successful in attracting many new guests.







"COSTA NAVARINO STANDS ALONE AS EUROPE'S BRIGHTEST AND MOST VIBRANT NEW GOLFING DESTINATION"

"We are spoiled as golfers because there are so many great places to go, but Costa Navarino is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to. It is more than just the golf offering there, it is the whole experience that is exceptional – from the nature, the culture and the people with their amazing hospitality to the food, the beach and so many activities to choose from."

Situated in Greece's southwest Peloponnese and a short and scenic drive from Kalamata airport, Costa Navarino opened in 2010 – fulfilling a lifelong ambition of its founder, shipping magnate and keen environmentalist Captain Vassilis Constantakopoulos, to create a sustainable tourism development in his home region of Messinia – and has quickly established itself among Europe's elite golfing destinations.

Situated over 125 hectares overlooking the historic Bay of Navarino and the Ionian Sea, Olazábal created the Navarino Hills courses in a unique location affording views to the sea, mountains and valleys.

Measuring 6,366m, the par-72 International Olympic Academy Golf Course received widespread acclaim from competitors when it was played for the first time at the 5th Messinia Pro-Am last November. The Hills Course is slightly shorter at 6,280m in length, with both courses featuring an average green size of 669m².

In line with Costa Navarino's commitment to sustainable development, a water reservoir with a capacity of 485,000m³ has been built to meet the irrigation needs of both courses, while 52,000 indigenous forest plants, shrubs and seasonal local flowers and herbs have been planted.

In addition, the new Navarino Hills golf facilities also feature a 60-bay driving range and a 15,000m² short game area, with the new clubhouse at Navarino Hills also opening at the same time.

Designed by acclaimed architect Lubomír Zeman and built using local stone materials, it has been created with the aim of achieving class A+ in energy efficiency and features photovoltaic panels.

Nuno Sepulveda, general manager of Costa Navarino Golf, said: "This is a fantastic moment for Costa Navarino and the culmination of four years of hard work from everyone involved in the project.

"From a personal perspective, it's been a privilege for me to work with José Maria and his team and to see his vision and dream become a reality in such an idyllic setting.

"The two new courses are very different in feel and character, with each offering their own individual set of challenges that must be overcome.

"When added to the two other signature courses and paired with the wide array of other premium sports, leisure and hospitality facilities available, Costa Navarino stands alone as Europe's brightest and most vibrant new golfing destination."

As you would expect from a venue of such high standing, the quality of Costa Navarino's golf courses are matched by the high standard of its leisure and lifestyle facilities, and further exciting developments are on the way with the opening of two more luxury resorts by spring 2023.

Opening this summer and situated at Navarino Waterfront, W Costa Navarino will be the first venue in Greece to debut Marriott's W Hotels brand. The 13-hectare beachfront destination is set to feature 246 stylish rooms, suites, and villas, as well as five dining venues including a destination beach club overlooking the Bay of Navarino.

It will be adjacent to the 'Navarino Agora' – a new open marketplace that will be open to the public with retail, street food, open-air cinema and exciting all-day programming.

In addition, the destination will continue its expansion next year with the scheduled unveiling of the first Mandarin Oriental property in Greece.

Set amidst a breathtaking 140-hectare natural landscape and overlooking the historic Bay of Navarino, the beachfront luxury resort will feature 99 guest rooms, including 48 spacious earth-sheltered pool villas, all with outdoor terraces and stunning sea views, along with five restaurants and bars.

With an abundance of leisure, sports and wellness, as well as dining and authentic local experiences, Costa Navarino is now more than ever – a truly all-encompassing golf destination, paying homage to its natural beauty and cultural heritage.

Costa Navarino truly has all bases covered but don't take my word for it. Take a trip for yourself, it's a decision you won't regret. **END**

NICK SOLSKI

OWNER, BOOMERS AND SWINGERS



When you launch a drive and the next sound you hear is a loud clang somewhere in the distance, that doesn't normally tend to spell good news for a golfer.

But at Boomers and Swingers, based at Astley Golf Driving Range near Manchester, the approach to golf is a little different.

Nick Solski is a fellow of the PGA and spent the best part of a decade working abroad at golf resorts in Eastern Europe, including three years at Chelsea FC owner Roman Abramovich's golf course in Moscow.

But the 39-year-old is on a personal mission to bring the sport to a wider audience.

These are golfers who may otherwise have gone nowhere near a clubhouse which demands socks of a certain colour or specific length to gain entry. In fact, the only time you fall foul of any dress code at Boomers and Swingers is when you look a bit too 'golffy'.

This particular mission is not about spotting talent at a young age – although there is the opportunity for those who have some ability to take their first steps in the sport. It's simply about stripping away some of golf's unnecessary barriers and increasing the general appeal.

It's hard to deny those cultural and social barriers still exist in golf. So it's ironic that Solski has added a few of his own obstructions in the shape of some interesting range targets. Forget those raggedy flags, how about lining up to take aim at a Chieftain tank which did battle with James Bond back in the day?

He explained: "We've got a whole host of things which act as targets, including two

tanks which were actually used in the James Bond film *GoldenEye*. It's good fun but the sound they make when they are hit is actually a bit of a disappointing thud – I guess their armour is a bit too strong," laughed Solski.

"We've had washing machines, skips, beer barrels and gas canisters, which make a far better sound. Anything will do really.

"I guess the idea stems back to my time in Russia. I took a real interest in behavioural science and I think that came from spending a lot of time in meetings with people speaking a language I didn't understand. You get to see the body language a lot more clearly when you've no idea what words are being spoken.

"So it's a bit of positive reinforcement, I suppose. When you're on a driving range and you hit a good shot, there is normally a flag or something and the ball lands near it and then you move on quickly and hit another shot.

"But in our case, when you hit a good shot – or a bad shot for that matter – and it makes a great, big clang. What's not to like?"

But there is a serious side to Solski's thinking, as he continues: "The biggest thing for me is it's about removing some of the barriers for participation and just making golf more fun.

"We've seen a much younger demographic and people you would never, ever see go to a traditional golf club: young people who probably thought golf was just a boring sport for old people.

"But if you build the base of the pyramid bigger, they can eventually move on from us and find their own pathway."





"IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT: A GOLFER'S EXPERIENCE IS 99 PER CENT FAILURE, SO IT'S ABOUT MANAGING THE EXPERIENCE"

Like it or not, golf still retains many of those stuffy attitudes, perhaps when well-meaning officials attempt to keep those 'less desirable elements' away from their club. Let's not forget that it wasn't long ago that Tyrrell Hatton fell foul of the establishment for the heinous crime of wearing a jumper with a hood in a Tour event.

Had certain Tour pros been sitting before the committee of some of the more traditional clubs in the UK, Tommy Fleetwood might have been requested to get a haircut and a shave, Tiger Woods may have been ordered to wear a polo shirt with a collar and John Daly would have been asked to leave, despite his individual efforts to inflate the bar takings.

Of course, the usual response from those who have risen to the positions of power at those clubs is those rules are based on maintaining standards of behaviour or respect for other members, but where is that line drawn?

Solski said: "We are competing with entertainment venues – not golf venues.

"In golf, a lot of people take it far too seriously at times and I don't want the experience of visiting Boomers and Swingers to be linked to your ability as a golfer.

"If you think about it: a golfer's experience is 99 per cent failure, so it's about managing the experience and just making it more enjoyable.

"People don't pay for clubs here – we give them out. We just try to make it as easy as possible for people to enjoy themselves.

"Pay £10 for 100 balls, bring your own beer, hang out with your mates and whack golf balls at a tank. We'll play music, there's always a nice buzz around the place. It's how we want to do it.

"Some people might think it gets too rowdy – that's absolutely fine. We are not for them and they are probably not for us."

This isn't just being disruptive or making rude gestures at the establishment though. There is an important social aspect to what is happening at Boomers and Swingers, especially in tandem with Positive Impact Golf CIC – a community initiative aimed at simply providing a venue and an activity to allow people to get together.

Solski said: "We run Chip & Chat – mainly for ladies, with some free coaching and a chance to have a cup of tea and a catch-up and various other sessions where we will give out some free coaching.

"I like the idea of it being a community hub. It's been a tough couple of years for a lot of people and they saw many of their social events cancelled and there are people who come down to whack golf balls with us who don't have a whole lot of contact with other people.

"We have a chat and a cup of tea and you can see them coming out of their shell once again.

"So I just want to get everyone mixing again. We've had some sessions here with some people suffering with Alzheimer's and it's great to see them interact with youngsters – I think that intergenerational socialising is mutually beneficial."

Although Solski maintains his professional status and became a Certified Club Manager in 2014, his ambitions for Tour glory have long since been shelved in pursuit of other achievements within the sport.

He recalled: "I turned professional aged 26 with a handicap of 4.4 and I had this three-year plan to play The Open Championship. Then I got into Final Qualifying, ended up shooting 78, 80-something and quit playing the next day.

"Danny Willett won that event and then I saw him a few years later when I was managing the club in Russia and thanked him for making me quit playing! He looked a bit confused until I explained it all.

"But you look back at that moment and it just helped me realise that playing was not going to be the route for me.

"I'll actually be looking to regain my amateur playing status at some point. I'll probably play off about five or six – that's fine by me and I'll be happy with that.

"We've actually got one of those machines you see at airports where it asks for feedback and you push the button with the happy face or the sad face. So we've put one of those in place here just to make sure we are getting the balance right and it tends to come out at 95 per cent happy.

"That's good enough for me." **END**



NICK WILLIAMS

CLUB PROFESSIONAL, ST ENDOC GOLF CLUB



Nick Williams still clearly remembers the day, over 40 years ago when he joined St Enodoc Golf Club – March 16, 1981.

He arrived from St Mellion Golf Club just down the road which at the time was a very modern country club boasting all the mod cons. St Enodoc on the other hand was a rather antiquated members club run by brigadiers and generals.

It was a life changing event he recalls: "The bulk of the membership was mostly retired gentlemen who played foursomes once or twice a week before disappearing into the clubhouse to play bridge in the afternoon.

"There were only a few keen golfers who were a good deal younger (in their mid 40s), a small number of enthusiastic youngsters – whom they referred to as 'tigers' – and a handful of ladies who played regularly but no juniors at all. So you had just 40 or 50 members playing serious golf as opposed to now when there are around 150 playing three or four times a week."

Since then his role at the club has changed quite dramatically. When he first arrived he was in charge of how the golf course was set up properly every day, even going out with the greenkeepers to do the pin positions depending on the weather conditions, and time of year.

"Since then of course we have much more professional greenkeepers as opposed to the retired farmers who knew a bit about looking after grass that I was working with."

At the start, it was just Williams in the pro shop, doing all the teaching, running the shop and helping out on the greenkeeping side – a tough juggling act back in those

days, though there was not much business in the pro shop and teaching opportunities were limited. So much so that it was so quiet at times that he nearly left after two years.

However the golf club then had a change of direction and more golfers joined the membership which gave him the chance to develop the coaching side of things and get involved in some county teaching. At the same time, he instigated a junior section and developed the practice range into a full driving range.

Indeed the first 20 years at St Enodoc saw Williams devoting a lot of time to helping the club move in the right direction in terms of boosting members, expanding the junior section and enhancing the practice facilities. Before that St Enodoc had just been a place to play some holiday golf and little more.

For the following 20 years, he has continued to focus on supporting the club to move forward, and given his experience and longevity, is seen as the person to turn to for advice.

When quizzed as to the biggest challenge he has faced in all his time at the club, Williams exclaims: "The internet! It has become the golf pros' friend but originally it was very much the enemy.

"With internet pricing in the late 90s and early 2000s giving customers incredible discounts, we had a big battle on our hands and simply couldn't compete with online sales. Now however we are able to match prices in our shop and at the same time offer a personal service and advice to members and visitors so we are back in business."





"WE HAD A BIG BATTLE ON OUR HANDS AND SIMPLY COULDN'T COMPETE WITH ONLINE SALES"

Looking ahead, the veteran pro sees the way the golf professional operates in the future as a very different proposition to his experience.

"You are now required to have a degree to be a club professional as it is a completely different job to what it used to be. Because of that, the role of the golf pro will change dramatically as they will be able to help golf clubs in almost every aspect of the club in terms of membership, the pro shop, course maintenance and conditioning thanks to their qualifications.

"It's a proper, professional job now," concludes Williams.

As for his greatest source of enjoyment in his role, Williams unsurprisingly reveals that it is the golf course itself.

"I have spent 41 years working at a place where everyone else wants to spend their holidays! Just five minutes from my office, I can be out in the dunes enjoying a glorious walk with magnificent views. A lot of people spend millions of pounds on holiday homes to just spend a few weeks a year here whilst I spend my life here working at a job I love. I am very lucky indeed."

He views St Enodoc as a genuine hidden gem with its charming location between the north Atlantic Ocean and the Camel River Estuary.

"The sea and channel views are quite simply magical, and it is a totally natural area of terrain as opposed to the man-made courses that you experience inland.

"The weather is generally very good most of the time thanks to the Gulf Stream running past us for most of the year which of course helps the conditioning of the course and is complemented by the free-draining sand of the dunes."

Since his arrival, all 18 holes of the Church Course have been architecturally looked at by various golf course designers – including Peter McEvoy, Martin Hawtree and, more recently, American Tom Doak – and have subsequently evolved throughout his whole 41-year tenure.

With William's influence, the course has gradually improved over the years and continues to do so to this day.

One big change that during his career at the club is the rise of the second course at St Enodoc, the shorter, less challenging Holywell Course, which is thriving with the recent surge in interest in golf.

Though it is difficult to compare the two courses as the Holywell is a completely different kind of layout, Williams is enthusiastic about it as a fantastic alternative to the championship Church Course.

"It's a shorter 18 and allows those who are not the greatest of golfers to enjoy a round of golf without being punished by the course," he explains. "Indeed it makes for a very pleasurable 18 holes for the average golfer which adds to the offering at St Enodoc.

"It is also a great track for beginners to play on and for mums and dads to take their kids out on to introduce them to the game. It's still a challenging course as it tests every part of your game and you need to use every club in the bag but it's not as tough as the main course. Let's just say it is a bit more forgiving! From my point of view, it helps get people into the game of golf which is great."

Moreover the Holywell is no afterthought in terms of care and attention that it receives from a maintenance point of view. More often than not, second courses are not kept to the same standard as the main course but with the introduction of its own head greenkeeper, the Holywell now benefits from exactly the same treatment as the Church Course that ensures the same high quality course conditioning.

After 41 years of playing the Church Course, Williams still finds picking an all-time favourite golf hole extremely difficult, such is the quality of the James Braid layout.

"There is no real frontrunner as every hole is unique. There is honestly something about every single hole that makes them special and a pleasure to play. However the par 4, 4th hole is perhaps my favourite if pushed," he says.

Despite his long-term tenure at St Enodoc, Williams has no plans to retire as he still enjoys the job so much and so sees no point in giving it up.

"I'm definitely not retiring any time now, but in four or five years time when I'm approaching 70, I may retire but I still love my job – the playing, the retailing side and the coaching so why would I want to retire.

"What is more, when the weather is good I'll definitely try and get out on the course once a day. I have shot 64 twice around St Enodoc and shot 29 on both nines but not at the same time so I'm still aiming to shoot a magical 58 one day!" **END**

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Date: Thu, November 19
Course: Royal County Down

You are the marker for
Karen Moss
Your marker is
Fiona Hampton

Marker • My Score • Results

Hole 18 Refresh

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yardage	300	433	400	299	403	400
Par	5	4	4	3	4	4

Karen Moss (72)

Score: 4 4 4 4 4 4

Note

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Words

Nick Brown
Export Sales Manager
Campey Turf Care

GUEST BOOK

NICK BROWN



When I told my father back in the late 90s that I was going into sales he was initially amused. After he saw that I was being serious, he did say that I needed to learn two things which interestingly I continue to try to deliver every day... 'Build trust not sales,' and remember you have 'two ears; one mouth; so use them that way.'

Growing up in the Far East, I was surrounded by my father's customers and suppliers where I saw friendships grow with customer relations key. I have been incredibly fortunate in my career to have found that by collaborating and being creative with customers and colleagues, true and strong friendships emerge. Where trust is paramount – fun comes along for the ride!

How fortunate that I now find myself working with a family business who advocates these ideals. Richard Campey and his family have formed one of the largest and most successful independent turf businesses in golf and leisure. Campey Turf Care is a company of innovation, representing incredibly robust renovation and maintenance brands like Koro, Imants, Air2G2, Dakota and Vredo.

Since joining the company last year, my role has been to bring these brands to a wider, global audience, ensuring that everyone understands what Campey Turf Care stands for, and what we can achieve when we all work together.

My father remains amused, and I continue to endeavour to have fun along the way. **END**

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