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NUMBER 142 | SPRING 2023

Toro Prepares For The 2023 Solheim Cup At Finca Cortesin



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FAIR COMMENT

It's always nice to be able to talk about something positive, rather than focus on the negative, and the good news is this will have an effect on you, our valued readers.

Turns out that, according to a recent article in The Economist, social media advertising has taken a hit, as various platforms turn to a subscription-based model to, not to just make money, but to achieve some sort of credibility.

But like many business-to-business (B2B) magazines out there, this publication is already an established title with an enviable 26-year track record. That's not to say however, that we take anything for granted.

The article states: "Since 2021 mobile advertising has been hampered by anti-tracking rules pioneered by Apple, which make it harder for apps like Facebook to target ads and measure their effectiveness. The results have been painful. Meta, Facebook's parent company, has reported falling revenue in each of the past three quarters. Snap, which owns Snapchat, has lost nearly 90 per cent of its market value in the same period."

In December, Twitter's new owner, Elon Musk, relaunched a \$8.99 per month Twitter Blue service, with the most significant benefit for subscribers being that their posts have a 'more prominent' place in the feeds of the likes of you and me. Facebook and Instagram users now have the option of paying a monthly fee of US\$11.99 for a 'verified' account, which gives them a blue badge and promises 'more widely distributed posts'...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

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



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FEATURING

SPRING 2023



BRUCE GERLANDER

WALT DISNEY WORLD GOLF

"We try and hang our hat on the Arnold Palmer style of hospitality, and we want everyone that comes here to feel comfortable, important and appreciated. That was the way Mr Palmer treated everybody."

22



TONY PENNOCK

SECKFORD

"No other PGA pro has done this, but I hope they will. However, ultimately, I've still got to put together the actual template for how it works. There is potential support out there from the dementia charities too."

26



TRACI IRONS IZZO

HERITAGE PALMS

"They took me under their wing, because I didn't have any experience in club management or even food and beverage management. But I used to be in the Marine Corps and that taught me a lot about initiative and integrity."

30



SEAN GRAHAM

FOXHILLS

"We are really excited to transform the par-three into a signature hole. A pond, which currently sits too far away from the green to influence club selection, will be extended to the putting-surface edge to create a more dramatic hole."

34



GARETH MACKLIN

OBBI GOLF

"So, I literally drew this idea up on a whiteboard and some clever people then took that information and built it accordingly. We started a software company the next day. Honestly, that's exactly how it happened."

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"WE HAVE RENEWED OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH TORO IN SUPPORT OF
OUR COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVING THE HIGHEST QUALITY STANDARDS
AS WE PREPARE TO HOST THE 2023 SOLHEIM CUP"



COVER STORY

TORO.COM



The Toro Company has been chosen as the official supplier of irrigation systems and turf equipment for the 2023 Solheim Cup, which will take place at Finca Cortesin in Andalucia, Spain, September 18–24, 2023.

In addition, Finca Cortesin has extended its partnership with Toro and local distributor Riego Verde S.A. (Riversa) to continue supplying the course's fleet of golf course maintenance equipment.

Spain will host the Solheim Cup for the first time at Finca Cortesin thanks to the collaboration of public and private entities in a project coordinated and promoted by Deporte & Business.

"Finca Cortesin strives for excellence in everything we do, from our golf course to our hotel and restaurants," said Vicente Rubio, president of Finca Cortesin Hotel, Golf and Spa.

"We have renewed our partnership with Toro in support of our commitment to achieving the highest quality standards as we prepare to host the 2023 Solheim Cup."

As part of the agreement, Finca Cortesin will add new Toro products such as the Greensmaster 1026 walk-behind greens mower and the all-electric Greensmaster eTriFlex 3370 riding greens mower.

"We've introduced a number of practices on the golf course to be at the forefront of environmental sustainability, and the all-electric eTriFlex is the perfect complement," said Finca Cortesin superintendent Iñigo Soto.

"We chose machines with lithium-ion battery technology for the reduced noise and engine exhaust emissions, as well as the outstanding quality of cut."

The agreement with Toro also includes efficient models that meet Stage V engine emissions regulations implemented in 2019 in the European Union.

The Reelmaster 7000-D semi-rough mower and the Groundsmaster 4500-D rough mower are part of this newer generation of fuel-efficient machines that will be used to maintain large turf areas at Finca Cortesin's championship golf course, which was designed by Cabell B. Robinson.

"Getting ready for an important tournament like the Solheim Cup requires top-notch equipment and a dedicated team," added Soto. "We're looking forward to working with Toro and having the support of our local distributor, Riversa, as course preparations get underway."

"It's an honour to be selected as the official equipment and irrigation partner for the 2023 Solheim Cup, and we're thrilled to be continuing our relationship with Finca Cortesin," said Rick Olson, chairman and CEO of Toro.

"As an official supplier for the Solheim Cup in Spain and the Ryder Cup in Rome, we are excited to have the opportunity to support back-to-back team events that showcase the top professionals in both men's and women's golf in Europe and the United States." **END**

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"MOTTY WAS POINTING TO VARIOUS AREAS WHERE CARS COULD BE
LOCATED IF OTHERS WERE MOVED SLIGHTLY. AT LEAST,
THAT'S HOW IT APPEARED"



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IT HAS TO BE SAID...MOTTY INSPIRED ME

Please could you forgive me for being self-indulgent in this edition? I do hope so. Because, if not, you're going to be well hacked off.

I want to go off piste for once and not write about golf. Instead, I wish to look back on my time with this publishing house, which was launched as Portman Publishing and Communications, in Portsmouth, in 1992. The reason for this will become self-evident in a few lines time. No, not yet. A few more lines to go.

That was also the year I walked through the door of a young publisher, Michael Lenihan, and was interviewed for a role as a part-time sub-editor. I smashed the interview, naturally, and I have worked as a freelance for the company ever since. When we started, we published football magazines and it was while writing for one of these that, for the first time, I encountered the legendary John Motson.

Ahead of the 1996 European Championships, played in England, eventual finalists the Czech Republic had based themselves in Lancashire, and non-League Bamber Bridge received a call asking if they'd be happy to play Berger, Nedved, Poborsky et al, in a warm-up friendly. Naturally, they acquiesced.

Which is why, late one June afternoon, Michael and I drove into the club car park which was packed to the gunwales. Indeed, the poor car park attendant was at a loss as to how he was going to fit in all the cars brandishing legitimate press passes. And there, alongside him, offering assistance, was John Motson – sans sheepskin; it was June after all. Motty was pointing to various areas where cars could be located if others were moved slightly. At least, that's how it appeared. I imagined he was saying: "Actually Des, it has to be said, if you move that Cortina..."

I was lucky enough to sit behind him in the press box. His notes were copious. I felt sorry for the guy sat next to him who must have been covered in the in-depth bios of third-choice goalkeepers and midfielders. Motty advised us that one late sub who came on to play on the left wing was, indeed, the Czechs' back-up, back-up keeper.

Although I was at a few more games with the legend, it was the only time I spoke with him. News of his passing in February shocked me in the same way as did the death of Peter Alliss, the undisputed Voice of Golf, whom I was lucky enough to speak with on many occasions.

Motty, Alliss, David Coleman and Barry Davies were the catalyst for my choice of career as a sports journalist – though my commentary career never reached their heights. I stuck largely to print, but had I not been inspired by them all, I'd probably be doing something much less interesting now. Just Barry left. The others are gone, but never forgotten. **END**



NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.EU.COM/NEWS



CHERVÒ SS23 COLLECTION INSPIRED BY ITALY'S ETERNAL CITY

Rome's iconic and glamorous style has provided inspiration for premium Italian clothing brand Chervò's eagerly anticipated Spring-Summer 2023 Collection — a fitting choice with the Eternal City set to be at the centre of the golfing world this autumn when it hosts the Ryder Cup. For decades, Chervò — an official supplier of the 2023 Ryder Cup — has been at the forefront of Italy's quest to provide high-quality golf apparel since launching in 1982 and, in that time, has released a range of high-performance items that have been worn by male and female golfers across the planet.

SEARCH 'CHERVÒ' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



RAIN BIRD EXPANDS GSV SERIES VALVES PRODUCT LINE WITH NEW IC MODEL

Rain Bird has added a new IC (Integrated Control) model to its Golf Solenoid Valve (GSV) Series product line. This new model provides the many benefits of GSV Series Valves to courses currently using the Rain Bird IC System which connects irrigation central control directly to every rotor and valve for optimal water and energy efficiency. "In today's highly competitive environment, golf courses can't afford the expense, labor and downtime that valve failures can cause," said Altan Tolan, product manager for Rain Bird Golf.

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GLENEAGLES ANNOUNCES NEW GOLF COURSES MANAGER

Gleneagles, the iconic Scottish hotel and luxury destination, has today announced Stephen Lindsay as its new golf courses manager, with immediate effect. Lindsay is a well-known face at Gleneagles, having been an important member of the greenkeeping team since arriving in Perthshire in 2019, prior to its hosting of the Solheim Cup. Before this, Lindsay was at the Wentworth Club in Surrey.

SEARCH 'GLENEAGLES' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story

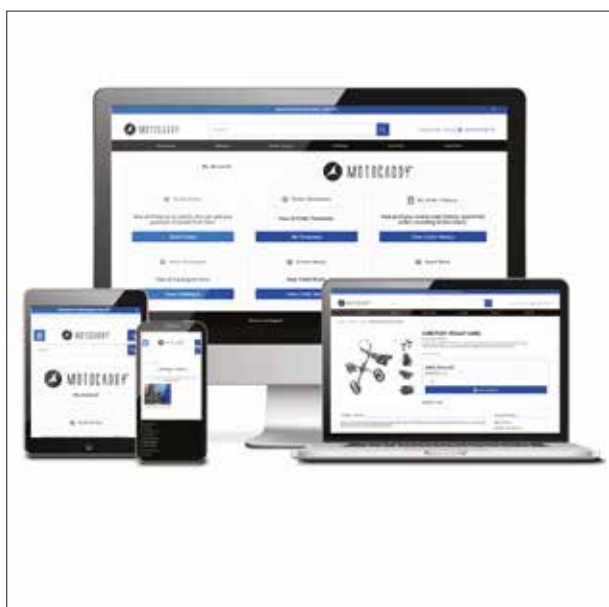


LOUIS OOSTHUIZEN DESIGNED COURSE TO SET NEW HEIGHTS IN MAURITIUS

Luxury development, Heritage Villas Valriche in Bel Ombre Mauritius, will welcome an impressive new second golf course, La Réserve Golf Links, in December 2023. It will be the only villa development in the Indian Ocean to offer two different styles of golf course complementing Le Chateau Golf Course, making it an outstanding choice for golf lovers. The new golf course has been co-designed by former Open Champion Louis Oosthuizen, alongside acclaimed course architect Peter Matkovic. It will be the first and only contemporary links course in the region and will feature panoramic ocean views from every hole.

SEARCH 'LA RÉSERVE' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



MOTOCADDY LAUNCHES PIONEERING TRADE ORDERING PLATFORM

Motocaddy, the UK's top-selling trolley brand, has launched a brand new B2B platform to allow its retail customers to place orders and manage their account more efficiently. The first of its kind within the trolley category, the new online portal is available initially to UK trade customers, with a rollout to other countries planned for the coming months. To maximise the full value of the user-friendly platform, Motocaddy stockists can register their account at: trade.motocaddy.com.

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AIR2G2 VERSATILITY PERFECT FOR BRUNTSFIELD LINKS GOLFING SOCIETY

Since a £1.2m course redevelopment in 2019, the popularity of Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society has surged along with the importance of the Air2G2 Air Inject. The work carried out by Mackenzie & Ebert was done while preserving previous developments by Willie Park Jr., Alister MacKenzie, James Braid and Fred Hawtree. The world's fourth oldest golf club had 80 bunkers redesigned and repositioned along with the addition of seven new greens, tee boxes and half of the irrigation system. Now, the greenkeeping team's most significant challenge is working between the old and new areas of the course.

SEARCH 'AIR2G2' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



INFINITUM APPOINTS JOAQUÍN MORA BERTRÁN AS NEW DIRECTOR OF GOLF

INFINITUM has announced the appointment of a new director of golf with Joaquín Mora Bertrán taking over the management of the three golf courses, the two clubhouses and the golf academy at INFINITUM. Mora is a student of the second edition of the Master CME in Golf Course Management and has developed an extensive career related to the world of golf: from being a professional player and master in the teaching of this sport, to the management of Catalana Golf, one of the most important companies in Spain for the organisation of golf tournaments and events.

SEARCH 'INFINITUM' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



FOREMOST GOLF ANNOUNCES NEW HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

Foremost Golf has announced a new leadership structure in key areas of the business to better develop its array of industry-leading support services. Under the revised structure, the Supplier Partnerships, Membership Services, Retail Marketing, and IT departments will each be led by an experienced Foremost team member, promoted to the Head of Department role. With a combined 38 years of service to the group, the newly appointed heads of department — and the wider Foremost team — deliver upon the group's promise of providing outstanding support and service to its membership of more than 950 golf professionals in the UK.

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OCEANTEE SHORTLISTED FOR PRESTIGIOUS GLOBAL TECH AWARD

The global Sports Technology Awards has shortlisted OCEANTEE in the highly contested Start-Up category. Recognised as the leading, international mark of excellence, The Sports Technology Awards celebrates tech-led innovation in sports and this year's awards shortlist includes 37 sports across five continents. "To see our name amongst this stellar line up of brands all of whom are pioneering innovation in their respective sports is almost unbelievable," comments Ed Sandison Founder of OCEANTEE.

SEARCH 'OCEANTEE' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



CREWS HILL GOLF CLUB WINS CLEARWATER SYSTEM AT BTME

A regular exhibitor at BTME, ClearWater once again had a very successful show last month in Harrogate, with owners Acumen Waste Services reporting a good number of enquiries and interest levels very high. General manager, Matthew Mears, said: "The show seemed to be back to normal after Covid, especially having the show in a different month to normal in the previous year."

SEARCH 'CLEARWATER' ONLINE

[at golfmanagement.eu.com](http://golfmanagement.eu.com) for the full story



CLUB CAR EXTENDS SUPPLIER AGREEMENT WITH THE DP WORLD TOUR

The DP World Tour today announces an extension to its long-standing agreement with Club Car, which will see the world's largest manufacturer of small-wheel, zero-emission electric vehicles retain its Official Supplier status. The new agreement will extend the current relationship, which began in 1999, through to the end of the 2023 season. Club Car's vehicles are crucial to the staging of DP World Tour events around the globe, assisting numerous aspects of tournament logistics from rules to television production.

SEARCH 'CLUB CAR' ONLINE

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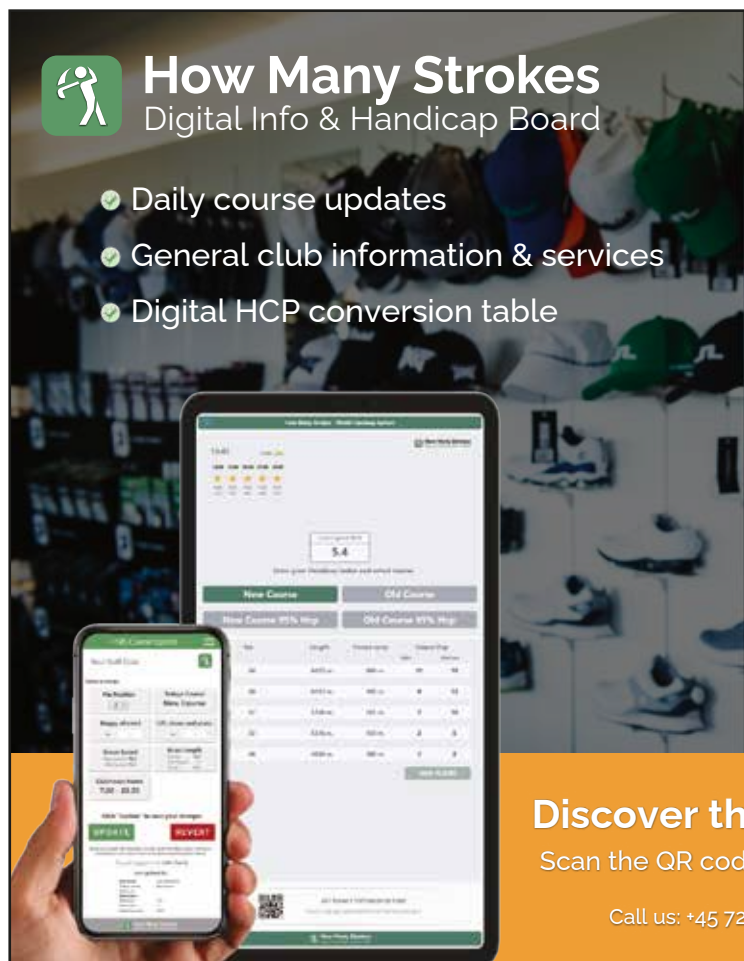
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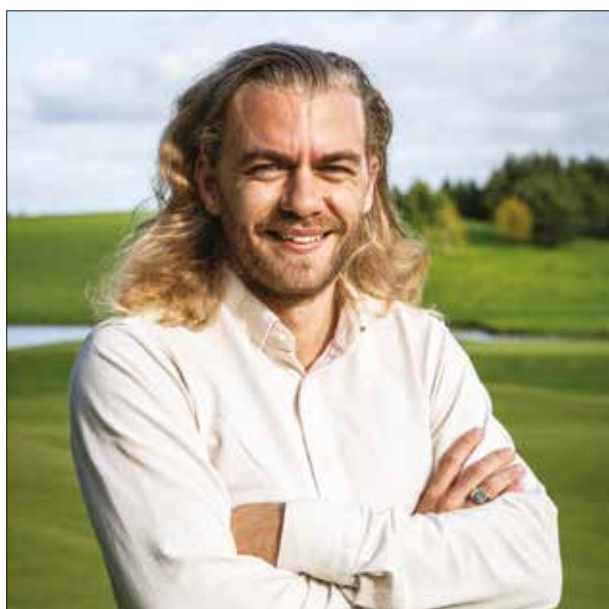


NOMINEES UNVEILED FOR 59CLUB ANNUAL SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS

59club will bring together their network of partner venues from across the UK, Ireland and Southern Europe as their 13th Annual Service Excellence Awards Ceremony comes to Hilton St Georges Park on March 2, 2023.

SEARCH '59CLUB' ONLINE

golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



59CLUB NORDIC LAUNCHES AND RECRUITS SEBASTIAN BENDTSEN

59club, the industry leading Customer Service Analysts and Training Provider has today announced its expansion into the Nordic regions of Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden & Denmark, bringing their wealth of Mystery Shopper Audits, Satisfaction Surveys and Employee Training Programs — created specifically for the golf and hospitality industry — to the fore.

SEARCH '59CLUB' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.eu.com for the full story



CLUB CAR BECOMES WORLDWIDE SUPPLIER OF THE 2023 RYDER CUP

Club Car has become a Worldwide Supplier of the 2023 Ryder Cup, extending its long-term association with golf's greatest team competition. Club Car has supplied team cars and support vehicles for the last 15 Ryder Cups and has been an Official Supplier of Ryder Cup Europe since 1997, when the event was held at Valderrama, Spain. It will now take on an elevated designation as a Worldwide Supplier to the 2023 edition of the iconic biennial contest, which takes place in September at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club in Rome, Italy.

SEARCH 'CLUB CAR' ONLINE

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NEW DESTINATION

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Royal Palm in Marrakech has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf, a portfolio of the world's premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

Situated in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and with snowy peaks in the background, the 18-hole golf course at Royal Palm covers 75 hectares of natural space offering a true commune with nature.

The golf course, which opened in 2013, was designed by Cabell. B. Robinson, who closely observed the environment and landscape, taking into consideration the Wadi river that runs through the area.

The 1,500m² Country Club has panoramic views of the Atlas Mountains and offers a modern, yet relaxed atmosphere with world-class amenities that reflect the high standards associated with the course, and adjacent Fairmont five-star hotel.

Royal Palm boasts fine-dining restaurants, exquisite ladies and gents changing facilities and a golf shop that provides the finest in golfing attire. An exclusive exercise and yoga room as well as a half sized Olympic swimming pool are also available.

CEO of worldclass.golf, Michael Lenihan, who visited Marrakech in December to evaluate the destination commented: "I first visited Royal Palm in Marrakech in 2016, a couple of years after it first opened for play.

"It was evident then that the destination had the potential to become a truly world-class golf destination, and returning six years later, I was impressed by the high standards, both on and off the course.

"Director of golf Michel Teichet and his team have worked hard to create a great visitor experience, and I was delighted to extend an invitation to join the portfolio." **END**



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BRUCE GERLANDER

GENERAL MANAGER, WALT DISNEY WORLD GOLF



They call it the happiest place on turf, and for 64-year-old Bruce Gerlander, one gets the sentiment that he feels genuinely content in his role as general manager of Walt Disney World's golf operation.

With a global reputation for fulfilling and exceeding people's dreams when they visit the 27,000-acre Walt Disney World (WDW) Resort in Orlando – officially the largest theme park in the world – you could be mistaken for assuming that Gerlander sometimes feels the pressure.

Operated and managed by Arnold Palmer Golf Management (APGM), Gerlander is the general manager responsible for overseeing two clubhouses and 63 holes of golf, not to mention three separate practice facilities all aspiring to offer a unique, and world-class golf experience to everyone that ventures out onto the courses.

Back in 2011, APGM and WDW entered into a 20-year partnership to improve the golf facilities, guest experience and course conditions across the four golf courses, and 2023 will mark the culmination of that process when the re-imagined Magnolia Course at Walt Disney World fully reopens.

Opened in 1971 along with The Magic Kingdom, the Magnolia Course has undergone an extensive redesign of all 18 greens, with holes 14-17 on the closing stretch re-routed, partly due to a new access road that has been built to ease the flow of the 12 million people that visit The Magic Kingdom every year.

Along with Lake Buena Vista, the Palm and the nine-hole Oak Trail, The Magnolia forms the centrepiece of the WDW golf

offering with more than 200,000 rounds hosted by APGM every year across the four courses.

And all under the supervision of Gerlander, who counts himself "lucky" to not only work at Walt Disney World, but also, in the golf business as he explains.

"I didn't come from a golf family," he states. "My dad was a fireman, and my mum stayed at home, so I came from a very modest background. We weren't Country Club people, and not even golfers.

"My interest in golf came from some friends who used to go to the local municipal course and caddy... back then it was \$5 a bag," he recalls fondly. "So, I started doing that in the summers, and on the weekends, I'd get up early and try and be first out in line to start carrying bags.

"You'd pick-up a few ideas, and try a few shots and play a little bit, and I fell in love with golf, and stopped playing everything else. I was lucky that I fell in love with it.

"I then got a college scholarship to play golf, and I've been working in golf ever since."

When asked if he ever aspired to become a touring professional, he laughs and says: "Yeah... the two per cent dementia side of my head. I look back now and laugh, as anybody that ever shot under par in a tournament thinks that, well, you know...

"I didn't fool myself and started with the PGA of America a long time ago, at a small course up north and I got lucky again, as I got to Innisbrook Golf Resort.

"Actually, I never wanted to be in the golf business – I wanted to be in business," said Gerlander.





"IT'S INTERESTING BECAUSE OF THE UNIQUE PROPERTY THAT WE ARE, THAT PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE THEIR ANNUAL GAME OF GOLF WHEN THEY'RE ON A DISNEY VACATION"

"I enjoyed playing, but I saw the life of the people that had good jobs and could still play, and they could beat most of the gentlemen that I saw that were golf professionals.

"So, when I got to Innisbrook, I saw a different side... I saw a business as opposed to a hobby. Most of the golf professionals previously I saw were ok players; good card players and real good drinkers.

"From the moment I got into the [golf] business, I was aspiring to be a business person."

Gerlander's determination to succeed led him to a 14-year role as GM at Orange County National Golf Club in Orlando, Florida, before moving to a struggling private club in Albuquerque, New Mexico that needed some guidance.

In a two-year period, Gerlander helped to avoid foreclosure, and converted the club into a debt-free, sustainable entity which included re-branding the club and giving it back to the local community.

"Albuquerque, New Mexico is a very small, poor town, and four individuals got together and pooled the funds to turn the club around, and to help the community improve. It was a lot of fun, and very socially impactful.

Gerlander admits that working in Albuquerque was "out of my wheelhouse, well out west in the mountains", and due to family pressures – his son, who grew up in Orlando and was born in the Arnold Palmer Hospital wanted to come back home – the family moved back to Florida.

And in September 2016, Gerlander landed the role of GM at Walt Disney World Golf, and feels like he's returned 'home'.

Disney is revered the world over for its guest experience and merchandise, and Gerlander describes the operation as "the most robust I've ever been involved with."

Pointing to murals of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, Gerlander says: "You put any one of these characters on anything we have in the shop, and it's going to help sell it. We're very fortunate, and sometimes you can't keep certain items in stock."

Historically, of the three 18-hole courses at Walt Disney World, The Magnolia was always perceived to be the signature course, hosting all three rounds of the Disney Classic.

But post Covid, and with the Magnolia partly closed for renovation, Lake Buena Vista and The Palm have taken the largest share of visiting golfers.

But with the emphasis on quality and not quantity, interestingly Gerlander has made changes to the tee-time as he explains: "When I came here, we were at eight minute flight times, and then we moved to nine, and now we're at ten," he said.

"We could certainly put more rounds out, but we're actually closing off later in the afternoon trying to just give the courses a break, as we've been so busy."

But that in turn brings other pressures, especially when it comes to the pace-of-play.

"It's interesting because of the unique property that we are, that people might have their annual game of golf when they're on a Disney vacation, or they just play a few times a year," said Gerlander.

"I can't say that we have the most avid golfers necessarily, but we have the most avid Disney fans that also play golf.

"[Pace-of-play] is a challenge, for sure," he admits. "Even with ten minutes, we saw round time shrink as we spread out the tee times, but it's a bit of a roll of the dice every day. We could get everyone round in four hours, ten minutes today and think we're smart, and then the mix of play tomorrow changes.

"We have just put GPS on all of the carts, and have player assistants out on the course as well.

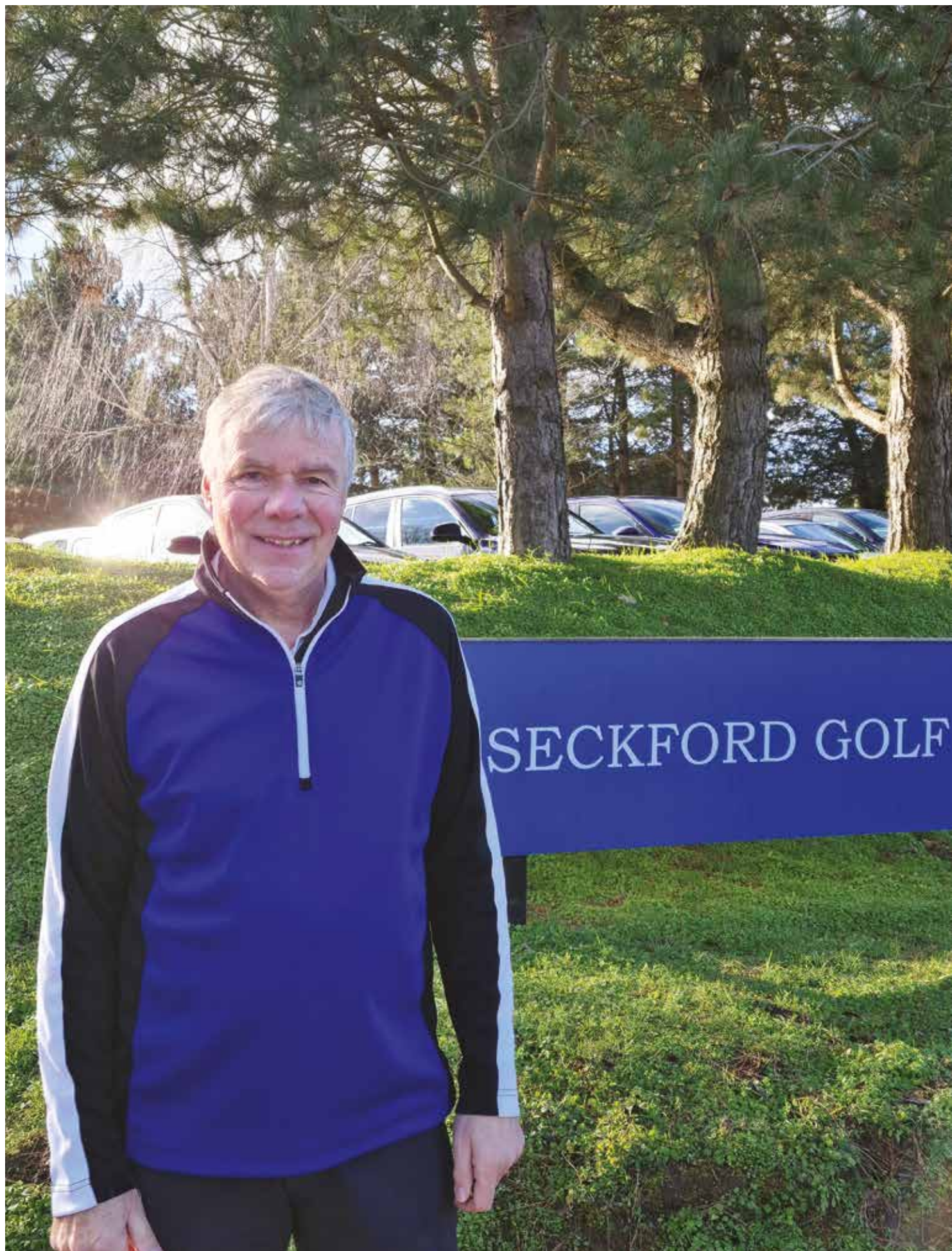
"We try and hang our hat on the Arnold Palmer style of hospitality, and we want everyone that comes here to feel comfortable, important and appreciated. That was the way Mr Palmer treated everybody.

"Mr Palmer never met a stranger, and he treated the bellboy the same as the president of the company. He always had time for you and shook everybody's hand.

"And we try to create a little bit of a relationship with everybody and come across in a sincere matter that says: 'We care that you're here; we want to take care of you and we appreciate you coming to visit with us.'"

With that mantra, chances are that Gerlander will see out the rest of his career at WDW saying: "I have no plans to retire. I love what I do. I don't feel like it's work." **END**







Words David Bowers
Online seckfordgolf.co.uk

TONY PENNOCK

GENERAL MANAGER, SECKFORD



A startling one in three people born in the UK this year will develop dementia in their lifetime. Yet only a third of people know they can do something to reduce their risk of dementia, by taking care of their brain health.

Those distressing figures, from Alzheimer's Research UK, should strike fear into us all. Few of us, if any, will go through life untouched by the effects of dementia. My mother suffered from dementia before her death in 2016, and the experience of Ipswich-based PGA professional – and Suffolk PGA secretary – Tony Pennock, who has seen both parents fall victim, has driven him to try to reduce the effects through golf.

He's not alone in this. In the north of England, Anthony Blackburn's Golf in Society has been using the benefits of golf to relieve the symptoms. But Blackburn is not a golf professional, and doesn't teach or coach, so Pennock – a fully qualified Class A-T (Advanced) PGA pro for more than 40 years – is now looking to take the concept a bit further.

He's started by holding monthly sessions at Seckford Golf Club, in Suffolk, where he was the first PGA pro in the early 90s and is now general manager.

He explained: "Anthony's pretty much the only other person doing this sort of thing. But he's not a golf professional. His background is in care, I believe, but he does run it alongside golf clubs, and he's got about eight or nine clubs up north he's working with. But no other PGA pro is involved like I am and I do run it for free."

Pennock first witnessed the effect social gatherings could have on dementia patients

at his local football club, Ipswich Town, which held monthly Dementia Café sessions, at which he volunteered.

He said: "I take the putting board down with me. The whole essence of it is that you're trying to give these people a little bit of quality of life and also to give the carer a little bit of a break. That's what it's geared to do."

"At the first café I was amazed at the reaction to the players who visited and the ability of football to stir memories, and wondered if I could do the same with golf. You've got a captive audience, potential dementia people in every single golf club."

"In discussion with Wendy Chard, from care specialist Home Instead, we decided to try to get them out on a golf course. So, really, without really too much more thought than that, we said, 'let's do it, straight away'."

But it wasn't quite as simple as transferring the processes in operation at the football club to a golf club. Not least the health and safety requirements.

"There are different aspects at the golf club," he said, "though we still have tea and cake available the whole time. When it's really cold, we have a little putting mat in here, we have other games to play too. But the biggest day, the first one we had, we went out to the course."

"At that stage, it was for people who have played previously. But now, it's expanded already so anyone can come, because we can show them how to play, we can let them just hit a few balls on the range, just have a putt, even just have a walk around. The golf course is the perfect place for this."



"WITH EARLY SIGNS OF DEMENTIA, YOU DON'T FEEL THAT YOU HAVE IT. YOU DON'T RECOGNISE IT OR AT LEAST WANT TO. ONE OF THE GUYS HERE AT SECKFORD, HE WOULDN'T COME INITIALLY"

"The whole fresh air, movement, all those different things. When you see it in action it's quite something."

Pennock, whose mother has had dementia for 11 years and whose father has been in a home for the last two years, recalled one inspirational participant attending for the first time.

He said: "Lyall, a Scot, is standing there and he's in his 80s. He said to his carer, 'Oh yeah, I used to play'. His first shot was like a 140-yard seven on a high draw. He hasn't played for ten years, because of his dementia. But instantly, he wanted to hit another one."

"Turns out he was born opposite the first tee at Carnoustie. We started talking to him about it, and he was like 'I can remember watching one day and Ben Hogan was playing...' It was just amazing."

"His carer admitted 'I haven't seen him like this for years. He's given him a new life. He's forgotten he can't walk'. It's unbelievable. It's like this has given these people an opportunity to forget they're basically housebound – it's the most enlightening thing I've ever done."

"And it just keeps snowballing. I've had calls from all over the country."

"With early signs of dementia, you don't feel that you have it. You don't recognise it or at least want to. One of the guys here at Seckford, he wouldn't come initially. Once he did come, I can't get him away. He loves it."

"He's not under any pressure. We've got two or three of them now come, with one more to come in. But they vanished from the club because they felt embarrassed to come. That's no longer the case."

The most people Pennock has had at an event thus far is 20: ten participants and their carers. But its popularity – and success – points towards more joining and a need for further sessions, as, currently, it's just on the first Wednesday of the month.

That also means the potential for expansion, a scenario familiar to Pennock, who is not shy to share a good idea. Indeed, he was the man who created the Points4Golf membership system, which has been used and adapted widely since.

He continued: "I'll try to expand it out to the rest of the golf clubs in the county for a start. The whole essence of the bigger picture is to develop almost like a franchise, I suppose. I haven't had anyone directly from the PGA come to me and go, 'This is brilliant'," he said.

"No other PGA pro has done this, but I hope they will. However, ultimately, I've still got to put together the actual template for how it works. There is potential support out there from the dementia charities too."

Naturally, when presented with this concept most golf clubs would ask about the commercial return. Again, as a GM, that's not lost on Pennock, but he believes the effort can be recouped in terms of goodwill, personal satisfaction, and positive PR.

He said: "You don't have to have a golf pro deliver it. You can do it with volunteers, but then you've got to train the volunteers. Also, you have to be DBS checked."

"You've got to do it properly if you're going to do it, have everything in place. If I'm going to drive someone in a buggy, then we need to know the implications of driving it across the road... it's complicated."

"But everybody involved has a warm feeling when they experience the difference they're making to these people. It's like seeing somebody come alive again. Who wouldn't want to get involved in this?"

While the project has been a personal quest for Pennock – "It's for my mum and dad really. It's all about dementia awareness" – it has also benefited Seckford, and not just because it's helped earn the club an EGU nomination for 'golf club of the year'.

"It has been a real journey with Seckford and, realistically, the whole business, the whole golf club, has come around to the positives. It's a very small golf club and has been really supportive. But the club's had a lot of good press off the back of it. We're ahead of the game."

"It's fabulous to see the positivity around the golf club, but it's mostly for the good of the people with dementia. Honestly, to see them smile... it's the quality of life they don't have, this gives them a little bit of quality and it livens them up." **END**

TRACI IRONS IZZO

GENERAL MANAGER, HERITAGE PALMS



When former US Marine Traci Irons Izzo applied for a part-time job with her local golf course driving a beverage cart, little did she realise she was setting in motion a career that would later see her as one of the few female Certified Chief Executives in the sport.

Now, Irons Izzo is general manager and chief operating officer at Heritage Palms Golf & Country Club, in Florida, a world away from dishing up sodas to sweaty executives.

Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Irons Izzo, 51, established her reputation in Florida before returning to the Great Lake State, and then back to Florida, where she was in increasing demand as her reputation grew.

But it all started at 23, when, with her then-husband and two children, she moved into a property at Champions Club, at Julington Creek, where her husband was a member.

She recalled: "I was keen to do something part-time, get out of the house, and make a little money, so I accepted a beverage cart position. But within a couple of weeks, the head professional, and the owner came to me and said, 'We see something in you. Are you interested in learning this business?' And I thought, what the hell? Why not? And so, I took the position as food and beverage director.

"They took me under their wing, because I didn't have any experience in club management or even food and beverage management. But I used to be in the Marine Corps and that taught me a lot about initiative and integrity. And I picked everything up very easily. They treated me really well.

"I spent four years there before my husband and I decided to move back to Detroit, and, soon after, we divorced. In this business, for most of the time, I've been a single mum of three children."

Which makes the success she's had seem all the more creditable. She enjoyed spells at Tam-O-Shanter Country Club, Knollwood CC – where she first experienced an interim role as GM – Forest Lake CC, and Great Oaks CC in her home state, before returning to Florida at Copperleaf GC, in Bonita Springs. It was in August 2021 she took on her present role at Heritage Palms, in Fort Myers.

And, since 2001, she has actively involved herself in local and national committees within the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA).

Not satisfied with just the four letters, Irons Izzo is also entitled to use the initials CCM (Certified Club Manager), CCE (Certified Chief Executive), and CAM (Community Association Manager) after her name, making her unusual, if not unique, among female general managers in the industry.

It was at Great Oaks where her creative thinking and influence really made her stand out from the crowd. When she joined in 2013 the club had a problem with membership retention; when she left, five years later, it had its first waiting list.

She explained: "We had a trial membership. We allowed members, or prospective members, to try the club for 30 days, without becoming a member. It was up to us, the staff, the members, to welcome them so that they felt comfortable and might want to stay there."







"THE BIGGEST CHANGE SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE IS THE CULTURE. THAT'S ACHIEVED JUST BY BEING A NORMAL PERSON AND NOT INSTILLING FEAR IN PEOPLE. I THINK THAT'S STUPID, TO BE HONEST"

With her children grown up and in homes of their own Irons Izzo had her heart set on heading to Florida so the move to Copperleaf was a natural progression.

She said: "I interviewed at other clubs in Florida for about a year or so before that happened. When I accepted that position, I knew it was a three-to-five-year plan. They said, 'We know this is not going to be your end club, but we want you to put some time and effort into it'. And they did okay. It was great.

"Covid was there for about a year while I was. I'll give the CMAA credit, because a lot of us worked together and talked about our ideas and what we were doing for our members. And that helped us all out. It was interesting, and members totally appreciated those things.

"Our staff would deliver members' food. We had parties where members would sit in their lounge chairs at the end of their driveway and we would drive by in golf carts, wearing our gloves, and we'd have a beer or hand out margaritas, freshly baked cookies, or get an ice cream truck going through the neighbourhood. We tried to go above and beyond and be creative."

Heritage Palms is a larger enterprise than Copperleaf, with two Azinger/Lewis-designed 18-hole courses – the Royal and the Sabal – and 1,662 homes to the latter's 570.

"It's 800 acres. It's huge. We have about 180 acres that are just nature preserves. And we have 40 individual communities inside our community, so they have their own look.

"I always say because we have three times the number of members of my last club, I get three times the amount of phone calls as I did at my last club, and three times the amount of emails. But I wouldn't say it's any more difficult. Nothing here happens that's crazier than at any other club I've been part of. It's just a lot more of it happens. I have a staff that is fantastic and it's easy to be here. They make my job easy.

"The biggest change since I've been here is the culture. That's achieved just by being a normal person and not instilling fear in people. I think that's stupid, to be honest. The members are always telling me it's an enhanced experience, which is really nice.

"I know I sound quite arrogant when I'm saying this to you, and I'm so sorry. I don't mean to."

She added: "They also love the increased communication. South-west Florida was hurt really bad with the hurricane, and that was amazing. So many other clubs were hurt a lot worse than we were, but we lost hundreds of trees. The clean-up was incredible.

"But the communication we sent out was sometimes two, even three, emails a day, just filling the members in with what was going on and what's been cleaned."

With a growing global movement looking to encourage more women into the management side of golf clubs, the potential bosses could do worse than look at Traci Irons Izzo for inspiration.

She added: "There are more and more women in the CMAA. My president is a female. I have two other board members that are females, out of nine board members.

"What's different about that is that she'll send me an email with hearts and flowers on it or a text with hearts and flowers, and it's just so sweet.

"My advice to anybody looking to make a start is to be who you are and to make the right decisions based on all of the members, not just the committee members, not just the board members, but for the entire membership. That's very important.

"I feel like I work just as much for my staff as I do for my members. That means I want them to be happy. I want them to make a good living. I want them to want them to enjoy their time here. And I take care of them just as I do the members. I think that's very important."

From a British – and European – perspective, it's refreshing to listen to somebody who's got confidence in themselves, because, generally, we're not that way inclined.

Traci Irons Izzo is clearly very confident, but certainly not arrogant, and seems content in her professional and personal life.

"I absolutely love being at Heritage Palms. And when I came here, I told my husband, 'I can see myself retiring at Heritage Palms', because they take care of me very well and appropriately, which is fantastic. And they're very good to me." **END**





Words Katie McLean

Online foxhills.co.uk

SEAN GRAHAM

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, FOXHILLS

Foxhills

Just back from a weekend in Morocco to celebrate his 30th birthday, Sean Graham is relaxed and buzzing with enthusiasm for his new role at one of Surrey's premier courses, where he has been head of golf operations and retail for the last five years.

"I feel like I have a real connection with Foxhills, so it's a really gratifying and proud moment for me to become director of golf here," says the man who only hit his first ball at 15 and turned pro three years later.

"I was pulled into the game by friends," he recalls. "It was just a casual thing really, though I was always a sports fanatic. Then I watched the 2006 Ryder Cup at The K Club.

"From that moment I was hooked. My first coach, PGA professional Matthew Lea, was a huge motivator, providing me with the environment and support to turn professional myself and he continues to be a friend and mentor to me today."

Graham's passion and skill led him to graduate as a PGA professional from the University of Birmingham's Applied Golf Management Course from which he was quickly snapped up by the Forest of Arden as a tournament co-ordinator, overseeing the play of the membership as well as large scale residential and corporate functions.

Since then, Graham has enjoyed a rapid rise in the industry and was recently inducted into 59club's Eminent Collection, recognising customer service excellence and exceptional management qualities.

He joined Foxhills in 2018 upon returning to the UK after working at Safaa Golf Club, Saudi Arabia, where he was golf operations manager for three years.

"I loved the challenge of managing a seven-star operation. The set-up, the attention to detail, customer service; golf is a totally impressive experience in the Middle East but footfall through a private members club is rarely high.

"I missed the buzz of a busy, vibrant business and when the opportunity at Foxhills presented itself the pull was three-fold.

"Firstly, the club's reputation is second to none," he explains. "Foxhills is the most stunning setting with the fairways of the Longcross in amongst the pine trees all the way.

"Secondly it was an opportunity to work with a diverse and motivated team and finally as someone who is commercially minded, Foxhills offered me the chance to develop my strategic planning skills; the owner's appetite for investment was sold to me as I walked through the door and has never gone stale for which I am very grateful."

Indeed, Graham's promotion comes at an exciting and pivotal time for Foxhills as he leads the golf team through a multi-million-pound course improvement and modernisation project.

He is overseeing the biggest structural changes in course layouts at the club's Longcross and Bernard Hunt courses since they were designed by Fred Hawtree following the purchase of the club by the Hayton family in 1983.

As the club marks that 40th anniversary, Graham is determined to ensure Foxhills secures its spot as one of the favourite clubs in Surrey's golfing utopia, with work on several holes on the back nine of the Longcross already underway.



"I FEEL LIKE I HAVE A REAL CONNECTION WITH FOXHILLS, SO IT'S A REALLY GRATIFYING AND PROUD MOMENT FOR ME TO BECOME DIRECTOR OF GOLF HERE"

"Tee positions will change on several holes to bring hazards more in play and encourage more strategy and creativity throughout the round," Graham explains.

Bunker shape and positioning; green size, shape and contouring; as well as herringbone drainage and irrigation upgrade work on holes 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the Longcross will soon begin too.

But it is on the 16th hole where the most complex part of the renovation project will take place.

"We are really excited to transform the par-three into a signature hole. A pond, which currently sits too far away from the green to influence club selection, will be extended to the putting-surface edge to create a more dramatic hole.

"The size of the green will also be increased to provide room for additional pin locations and a new bunker will be built on the left side of the green to remove the temptation of bailing out."

Phase two is scheduled to begin in summer 2023, with attention turning to improvements across the rest of the back nine on the Longcross before moving onto the Bernard Hunt in 2024.

Named after the former Foxhills' head professional and ten-time Ryder Cup star, the Bernard Hunt course is longer, fairways are more open and it's more forgiving off the tee providing a thrilling challenge for golfers of all abilities.

"The course changes are going to make a positive difference to the playing experience. It's important to us that the courses are enjoyable for all levels of golfer, from low handicappers to mid-high and the master-plan for this project was designed with this at the front of our mind."

Whilst there's no doubting Graham's passion for both the game and the business of golf, it's clear the people who play it are just as crucial to his job satisfaction.

"The members are what it's all about. I hope my promotion here reflects the relationship I have with them. They are always inviting me out for a round," he laughs, adding he doesn't take up their offers as much

as he'd like to, not least because his two-year-old daughter now makes a play for his attention as much as the fairways.

"We live close by and whenever we drive past Foxhills, she gets so excited to come here, it really is a family club at heart with a warm and welcoming vibe. She's not quite old enough to start playing golf herself yet but it won't be long!"

In the meantime, Graham is looking forward to Foxhills hosting more high profile competitions once its course improvements are complete.

"One of my favourite memories was hosting the recent PGA Cup which we had been building to as a team and a club for the last four to five years. It was a long and intense week, hosting the US team and their families and it was closely fought, but seeing our courses featured on TV and that trophy on the first tee all week was really special."

There are challenges of course, particularly in relation to sustainability and water conservation.

"Last summer's extreme temperatures meant we had to adopt creative methods to store and conserve water, but we handled it well through the team's diligent steps to work efficiently."

On top of the strategic responsibilities at Foxhills, Graham also has a day job managing some 25 staff and overseeing Foxhills' busy events schedule and members' calendar.

"We host up to 90,000 rounds of golf across both our courses each year so we need to ensure we maximise space and manage and track levels of play to ensure the members' experience remains excellent.

"The atmosphere is very buzzy and contemporary; we are not a stuffy old Surrey golf club. We often hear members describe us as a 'home from home' because they can just relax and be themselves here.

"Foxhills is a vibrant resort where there's always something going on. Business is done here; fun is done here. We pride ourselves on delivering a stress-free seamless experience for not just our golf members, but often their whole families too." **END**

ROYAL PALM

ROYALPALMMARRAKECH.COM

Words Michael Lenihan
Location Marrakech, Morocco

I can vividly recollect my last visit to the Royal Palm in Marrakech. It was June 24, 2016, the day after the UK referendum on membership of the European Union, and as I had an early morning flight out of London, by the time I landed in Africa, the UK had voted to leave the EU, and David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister had resigned.

Chaos ensued back in London – and some would argue, does to this very day – and I recall arriving at the serene lobby of

the five-star Fairmont Royal Palm reflecting how calm and relaxing it was compared to the turmoil that I had left just four hours earlier.

My visit in 2016 was as a result of the Moroccan tourist board seeking to promote the North African country as a credible golfing alternative to the Southern European destinations of Spain and Portugal, and upon arrival in Marrakech, you are instantly aware of the fact that you are most definitely not in







"WIDE-OPEN FAIRWAYS AND GENEROUS GREENS MAKE FOR A MORE FRIENDLY AND RELAXED GOLFING EXPERIENCE"

Europe, something British Nationals are now getting more and more accustomed to post Brexit.

The culture, the language, the currency. Everything is different to Europe, and that also includes the golf – but in a good way. The courses are nowhere near as busy, and the cost of the golf, nowhere near as expensive either.

In the early 2000s, the King of Morocco – His Majesty King Mohammed VI – looking at how the sport had turned around the fortunes of Dubai, prompted a frenzy in activity in an attempt to mirror their Middle Eastern success, and make tourism the second biggest contributor to GDP in the country.

The '2010 Vision' sparked a construction boom with many courses built – and many with grand plans for as yet unfulfilled real estate.

Yet the one stand out success story has to be Royal Palm Marrakech which has delivered on its remit of world-class golf, a five-star hotel and residences that have actually been built, sold and are lived in.

Situated in the shadows of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains, the Royal Palm Marrakech is a luxury oasis stretching over 231 hectares, yet only 15 minutes away from the hustle and bustle of Marrakech Menara airport.

Opened in 2013, every room at the Fairmont hotel overlooks the golf course and the mountain range, with the 2,000sq² swimming pool forming the centrepiece of the resort.

In total, 134 rooms, suites and villas are available, all complemented by four restaurants offering a diverse range of gastronomy, including the spectacular Al Ain, serving traditional Moroccan cuisine that needs to be savoured and experienced.

And the dining options are now extended to the clubhouse – or Country Club – which was built a year after my visit, and which forms the starting and end point for visiting golfers.

Built in 2017, the Country Club also has panoramic views of the Atlas Mountains and offers members and their guests a modern, yet relaxed atmosphere with first class amenities.

It naturally boasts a host of facilities that reflect the high standards associated with the name Fairmont, including dining areas

Le Sabra Restaurant and Legends' Bar, coupled with the most exquisite men's and women's locker rooms and a golf shop that provides the finest in golfing attire.

The Country Club also offers an exclusive exercise and yoga room as well as a semi-Olympic swimming pool, but it is the golf course which is the main attraction.

Designed by Cabel B. Robinson, the par-72 course at Royal Palm measures 7,226 yards off the back tees, and is a fair test of ability for golfers of all handicaps.

Wide-open fairways and generous greens make for a more friendly and relaxed golfing experience, with the layout designed primarily for the 'average' golfer, as opposed to the occasional touring professional.

That's not to say that the course is easy – far from it – but it is fair, with the ability to run approach shots up to greens, rather than having to negotiate tricky greenside approach bunkers as is so often the case in the Middle East.

Formerly an olive plantation, Robinson has crafted what was once a feature-less plain into a beautiful golf course featuring 1,500 palm trees, all of which were planted by hand.

He closely observed the environment and landscape, taking into consideration the Wadi river that runs through the area, with every tree and every hill combining to create a course bordered by bougainvillea and oleanders.

The transformation has been truly spectacular, and if I had to pick out one individual hole for merit, it would have to be the par 3, seventh hole, which plays to a peninsula island green protected by bunkers.

With Morocco located in North Africa and therefore outside of the EU Schengen Area – which will later this year introduce a US-style ETIAS visa for all non-EU visitors – travel to Morocco remains visa free.

Furthermore, the country is not governed by the 90/180 day rule that limits stays within the Schengen area, meaning that non-EU investors seeking opportunities to purchase real estate on a golf course away from the traditional markets of France, Portugal and Spain, really should consider Morocco, and in particular, Royal Palm.

It may have taken seven years, but at last, I think I may have finally found one benefit of Brexit. **END**



Words Steve Wilson

Online obbi.golf

GARETH MACKLIN

CEO, OBBI GOLF



There are times when it has felt like the golf industry has been dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st century. Now the technology penny is finally starting to drop, you sometimes wonder how any club ever coped before.

Cast your minds back even a few years and the very notion of members booking their weekend fourball via an app on a smartphone would have seemed like a far-fetched vision of the future.

The rusty old ball chute by the first tee or the sign-up board in the locker room did the job, but there is another way, a quicker way, an easier way.

Belfast-based Obbi Golf's Gareth Macklin wrestled with that principle when it came to addressing the difficulties of some of the inner workings of golf management – most notably around the thorny subjects of compliance, safety and training.

Unhappy with the options presented to him when he sat on the other side of the fence during operational roles in hospitality and care home management, the 42-year-old entrepreneur took matters into his own hands and devised his own system which was then brought to digital life by his team of tech experts.

Macklin explained: "The whole idea was borne out of frustration. We spoke to a vast array of companies and none of them were suitable. I just felt there had to be a better way.

"We were trying to find a product to make our own businesses better around compliance, safety and training and while there were lots of individual solutions available,

there was nothing that brought the whole thing together for the operational team – including the management.

"As an operator, I didn't want to have lots of different systems – I want it all in the same place and under one system. It didn't need to be complicated – it just needed to be easy to use for the most senior manager down to the operational staff on the floor. The bottom line is, I couldn't find it anywhere.

"So, I literally drew this idea up on a whiteboard and some clever people then took that information and built it accordingly. We started a software company the next day.

"Honestly, that's exactly how it happened," Macklin explained.

Those at the sharp end of golf management will know the challenges all too well. Finding the balance of time and resources is notoriously difficult and effective communication between departments is vital.

Macklin said: "There are a few main areas where we really help golf clubs: compliance, safety and training of their people, processes and property.

"It's a web-based platform that has been in use for six years in construction and manufacturing, but we launched in the golf market just over a year ago.

"Our senior team are all from an operational background, so we have stood in the shoes of our clients daily. We know their pain points as we experienced them ourselves.

"It's a bit like a waterfall effect. The general manager is trying to pass information down the club through heads of departments and members of staff and then that action must be passed back up the waterfall.



"WE'VE ALSO SEEN CLUBS HAVING A REDUCTION IN THEIR INSURANCE PREMIUMS BECAUSE OF IMPLEMENTING THE SYSTEM"

"For so many clubs, its email, it's Excel documents or a note on someone's desk.

"So we've reversed the waterfall and feed the correct information directly to the staff member and the information is then stored away securely – all by logging on to Obbi Golf.

"It's that instant availability of the information and the timesaving involved that appeals to clubs. So if I'm a greenkeeper and want to look at a safety certificate before using a piece of machinery, or if I was a head greenkeeper and wanted to check on all of my staff's safety training or a general manager checking our safety certificates, I can do all of that in a few seconds.

"This system cuts about 76 per cent of admin time – you're not going through filing cabinets looking for documents that have been stored incorrectly when you most need them. It's also about mitigating the risk and for a general manager. We give them complete peace of mind.

"Have we done our audits on machinery and fire safety checks? Is the safety certificate up-to-date for when contractors come on site? All of those answers probably sit in a filing cabinet somewhere. But we all know how difficult it is to find that information quickly when you really need it.

"If you have your fire safety certificate coming up in two months, a sheet of paper is not going to jump out of the filing cabinet to remind you. But our system gives you reminders in advance as and when any of those things are going to expire or require action."

Aside from the reduction of admin and easing the workflow process, there are major benefits in avoiding legal liability.

Macklin said: "We spoke to more than 100 golf clubs in our initial research phase, some with committees and board members. Some of them don't realise when they may have a legal responsibility if something goes wrong at the club.

"Heaven forbid there is a fire or someone gets seriously hurt, committee members or general managers can sometimes be held legally responsible, rather than their clubs, over compliance issues.

"If an accident happens at a club and the regulators come in to check on safety certificates, you need to be able to prove those documents exist.

"Whether people choose to do that with our system or a pen and paper, it doesn't make a difference as long as it's done. We just make it an awful lot simpler and quicker."

The platform can be tailored to suit clubs of any size with more than 50 clients already signed up in the first 12 months and the future looks bright after a recent £1.25m investment to take the business to the next level.

Macklin said: "We're currently concentrating on the UK and Irish market but the medium-term plan is to take that to a more global basis and the longer term is to move into other sports and the insurance industry.

"We're already speaking to a Premier League football club, horse racing, yachting, rugby and this is just early research. We've had very positive feedback so far.

"Our smallest club at the moment has seven staff and our biggest one has about 250-300 but I suppose the biggest challenge is educating people that there is a better way.

"It's the way we all did it for years and years. But once people see the product and the simplicity of it, they get it. We've also seen clubs having a reduction in their insurance premiums because of implementing the system."

And Macklin draws a comparison with another seismic shift in recent times on the modernisation of golf clubs. He said: "If you think back to the early 2000s and your club's tee booking system, did most clubs embrace that idea to start with? Probably not.

"Some clubs had the ball chute or a sign-up board but now we all book our tee times from our phones and the thought of not having it seems alien to everyone.

"Some will always be wary of the technology but they just need to be made aware of what it can do with a bit of knowledge and education.

"There will be people out there who don't realise they have a problem in the first place or wouldn't know how to solve it if they do know they have a problem. But if you can't tell me or someone if you are compliant with something in the next five seconds, you need to speak to us to see how we can help."

Embracing technology can often meet resistance when it is seen as over-complicating a task. But when it makes everyone's life easier, it's hard to make an argument against it. **END**

WHS INTEGRITY AT RISK

AS CONGU NOT ON PAR WITH REST OF THE WORLD



Amid all the concern about change and the subsequent confusion over the complexity of calculations there remained a deal of consensus over the introduction of the World Handicap System (WHS).

After all, who could disagree with an attempt to ensure that, taking into account a course's difficulty and the golfer's abilities as reflected by their handicap, a method was devised that provided a level playing field worldwide?

It would mean, it seemed, that the golfer travelling to compete seriously abroad would be gauged on the same basis as all other event entrants while the casual player on foreign soil could strike, say, a \$5 or €5 bet with a playing partner designated at the whim of a starting sheet with confidence that both handicaps offered a fair reflection of abilities.

However, to paraphrase the pig Napoleon in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, all handicaps are equal, but some are more equal than others.

The fact this is so became apparent as the world's golfing population began to wriggle free from the restraining grip of COVID-19 and travel further afield to play.

Among those to gain an awareness that the handicap landscape had not been levelled by WHS was Dane Tonny Gottlieb, whose curiosity was piqued both professionally and personally when he did not receive the number of strokes he expected at courses while on a trip to Scotland last summer.

Gottlieb was more likely than most to have been acutely and quickly aware of

such anomalies since he is CEO of How Many Strokes and creator of their Digital Conversion Table, an interactive display that allows players to view all their possible handicap options at a course in a matter of seconds.

"I was at St Andrews for a week. I brought the mobile calculator and at all the courses I played I noticed there was a difference," said Gottlieb. "So I was wondering if I had done a mistake."

A few months later after visiting Costa Navarino in Greece, Michael Lenihan, publisher of this journal contacted Gottlieb stating that he too had noticed a discrepancy, prompting the Dane to take a deep dive into both the USGA's and the R&A's rules of handicapping.

"I found [the rules of handicapping] from the USGA and from the R&A and then I actually discovered that there was a difference around December 2020," Gottlieb revealed.

"The R&A made a note where they had changed the formula for the stroke index calculation and then my brain started spinning because I thought, 'that's a problem'. So then I started to do the math and we [How Many Strokes] did a lot of numbers, checking back and forth, and it is a real problem.

"One of the things that struck me was that if you are in the UK playing all year round there and you get adjusted in a local club then go to play a tournament outside the UK, you actually get punished.

"For example, as a 13-handicapper you should probably maybe get 14 or 15 strokes when you go to play in mainland Europe or the US or anywhere in the world, but





"WHEN I READ WHAT THEY (THE R&A) ARE SAYING ABOUT THE CULTURAL ASPECT, MY INTERPRETATION IS THAT THE CHANGE WAS TOO BIG AND THEY DIDN'T WANT THAT BIG A CHANGE"

you actually get fewer strokes than you're supposed to. Conversely, Americans or continentals visiting the UK will have an advantage."

The reason, it transpires, is that there are not one but two different formulas that national associations have been granted discretion to use.

The CONGU countries and others, including Vietnam, South Korea and some South American countries, do not use the option to add course rating minus par to the formula that was the – perplexed – talk of all clubhouses when WHS was on the horizon, namely dividing slope rating by 113 and then multiplying the result by the player's handicap index.

As the rest of the world does use the option, this can make for some startling differences as Gottlieb unearthed when taking three examples – players with handicaps of one, 18 and 36 – and calculating across a wide spectrum of slope and course ratings for both formulas.

Among these was the fact that the one-handicapper receives a single shot every time under CONGU calculations, but would play off plus 11 for the easiest course and receive seven shots at the severest test under the alternative system.

This disparity using the rest of the world's calculations that embraces the course rating minus par factor seems in keeping with what you might expect by tailoring any given day's strokes received according to the difficulty of the course as well as handicap.

The rationale for offering two options, say the R&A, is to allow national associations to continue to support their local golfing culture, for instance whatever are their preferred formats for handicapping purposes (eg competition, general play, match play, stroke play, fourball).

But Gottlieb and others contend that the existence of two options within the WHS undermines its very ethos of producing global equality ahead of the first shot on the first tee.

"When I read what they (the R&A) are saying about the cultural aspect, my interpretation is that the change was too big and they didn't want that big a change," posit-

ed Gottlieb, who feels CONGU's choice to ignore including the course rating minus par element is because doing so meant the new system mirrors the former system based on Standard Scratch Score more closely than the option to include it.

"In Europe we have been using this calculation that we're using now for the last 20 years, so the change for us was not very big," he added.

"Actually, there was no change in the way it was calculated, but the change in the UK would have been more extensive because it was a fundamental change from what you used to do."

He believes that as recognition grows that the WHS somewhat contrarily offers two options, the R&A will ultimately conform. "I anticipate that eventually the R&A is going to accept this because it makes a lot more sense to do it this way," said Gottlieb.

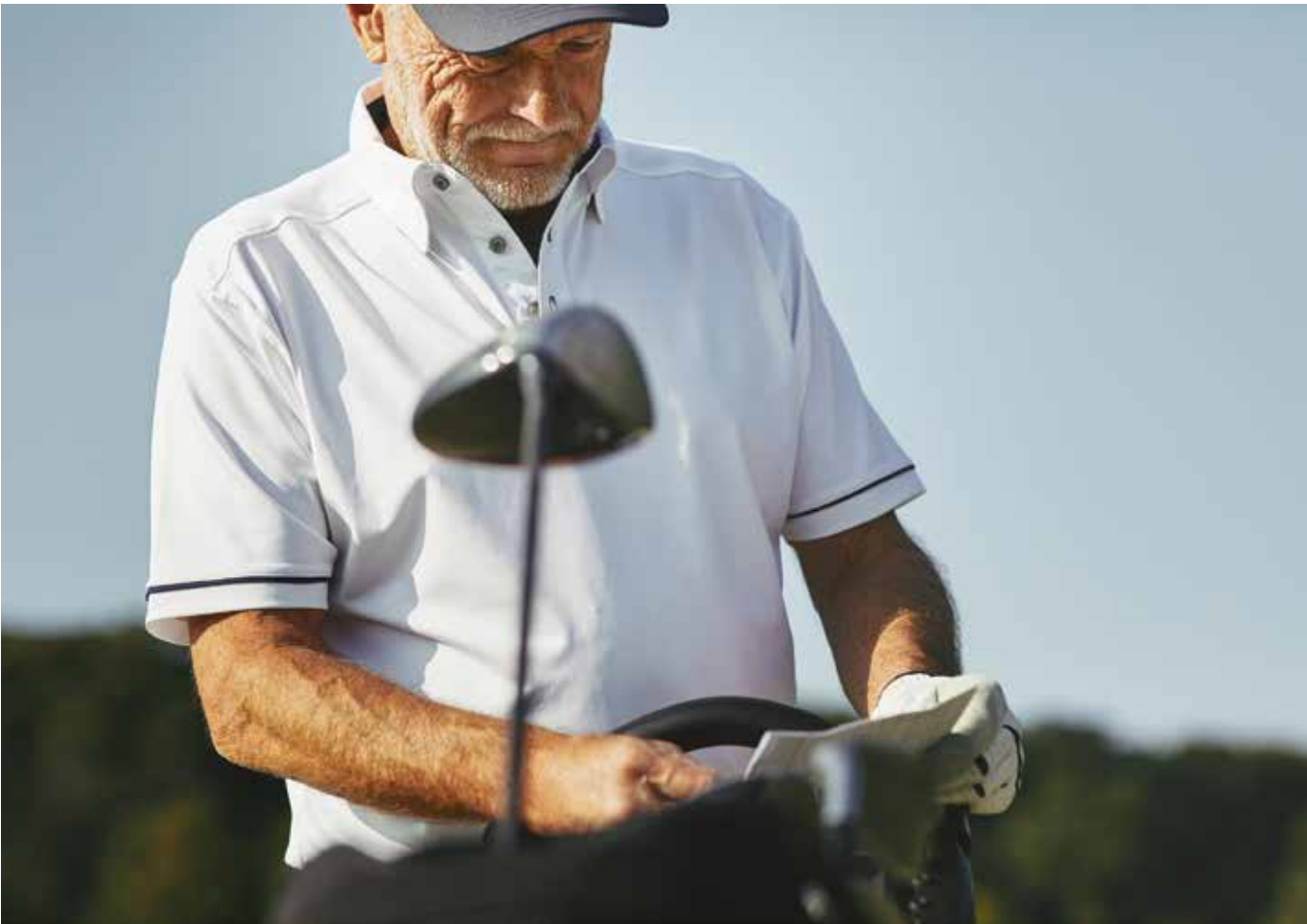
"They also have to accept at a certain point that they need to make this 'big bang' adjustment. You cannot do this gradually, so at some stage they have to say, 'We're doing it now' and then everybody will get a different handicap overnight in the UK."

Serendipitously, the irregularity came to light just as How Many Strokes began their expansion into the UK market, and it took technicians just a day to set up the option to base calculations without adding course rating minus par.

"The math part of the development is like second nature. The beautiful thing is right now that the customers we have in the UK, Vietnam, South Korea, places like that, when they decide to switch to the system that's the same as the rest of the world, it's just a switch," he said. "Just one second and they'll be over to the new system."

While silicon chips in How Many Strokes' server will offer no resistance to such a switch, there may be some upcoming mental short circuiting and even fuses blown as more and more golfers across the globe plug in to the notion that the WHS is a binary system, not the unifying conduit that is was perceived to be.

And that is even before those of us in the UK face up to the 'big bang' moment that Gottlieb feels is only a matter of time. **END**



"THE PERCEPTION OF GOLF IS ONE OF TRADITION AND EXCLUSIVITY, WITH
A HISTORY OF LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE"



Words

Vanessa Bell
Head of Fundraising
Golf Foundation

GUEST BOOK

VANESSA BELL



There has been a lot of discussion and effort about how to get more women and girls working and staying in the golf industry. It is, without question male-dominated, and navigating the challenges to finding equality is seemingly a big ship to turn. Generating a pool of interest from an early age is something my organisation works incredibly hard to do and it's the very pool from which I came from.

Increasing the numbers of girls in the base layer should result in more females considering a job role in the industry in the future. The perception of golf is one of tradition and exclusivity, with a history of limited opportunities for women to participate. It's this lack of opportunity that has led to an under-representation of women in leadership roles within the industry.

There are plenty of women working in golf – you just have to look at the popularity of The R&A's Leadership programme – and the desire of these women to progress is clear. So how can we fast track this progress?

It is about changing perceptions and making employing women normal, rather than exceptional. It's about widely promoting jobs and dispelling the myth that golf is an old boy's network. It's supporting those already in the industry and making sure women have a voice. We all agree that golf needs to modernise, to be more diverse and inclusive but we can't do that if we always have the same people sitting at the table. **END**

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