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NUMBER 150 | SPRING 2025

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"AS THE SPRING 2025 ISSUE MARKS OUR 150TH EDITION, I WOULD LIKE TO PLACE ON RECORD MY SINCERE THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO EVERYONE WHO HAS MADE THIS POSSIBLE"

FAIR COMMENT

La Manga Club in Spain, holds a very special place in my heart. It was the place I visited on my first ever 'FAM' trip back in 1993 — accompanied by David Bowers, who remains a loyal and invaluable member of the team — and, I guess, it was then that I started a love affair with the region, which still endures to this day.

On that press visit, I started to take more than a passing interest in Spanish property prices, and recall — pre-crash — that I could have bought a four-bedroomed villa, complete with swimming pool for the same price as a three-bed semi where I lived in the UK... hindsight's a wonderful thing.

The Hotel Príncipe Felipe, at La Manga Club, is where I proposed to my wife, Jane, the best part of 28 years ago, and, as we purchased a villa close-by a few years ago, the North Course, at La Manga, is where I played my first competition as a Spanish Federated golfer last month. But it was in 1996, when I stumbled across a magazine on a table-tennis table at La Manga Club, that my life was shaped.

Having just sold the publishing rights to Football Management — a B2B magazine I launched in 1993 — Jane and I spent a few days cosseted in the five-star luxury of the Príncipe Felipe. As I walked into the changing rooms adjacent to the outdoor swimming pool, I saw a copy of Golf Enterprise Europe floating around.

With a passing interest in golf — I used to watch The Open back then but never seriously played — I picked it up, took it back to my sun lounger, and the rest, as they say, is history...

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/comment/150



Words
Michael Lenihan
Publisher



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FEATURING

SPRING 2025



RUSSELL HANNAH

IMG

"Across IMG, we've always focused on being the best, rather than the biggest. We are a boutique operator and currently have 20 to 25 projects. Of course we'd love to grow the business, but we're never going to be 200, 300 plus venues."

30



MARK DARBON

THE R&A

"I find it concerning that in a list of sports, ranked by engagement, golf does not feature in the top 30 for Gen Z adults. We've got some work to do around how we break down barriers for young people to get them into the sport."

22



MORTEN BISGAARD

PLAYERS 1ST

"We've launched a partnership with England Golf in order to build the biggest financial benchmarking platform in England, so you can have an idea about how you're performing against your peers, both revenue wise but also cost wise."

34



DJ FLANDERS

TROON

"Look at my CV and you'd think I'm running from the law, but my role was a 'turnaround' guy. I was always 'come in, turn it around' and then hand it over to another general manager. I got in a niche where it was three years and I would leave."

26



DAVID GREEN

BASINGSTOKE GOLF CLUB

"When I received the call from Scott Patience offering the position I was so elated as to be able to come in, finish the golf club off and set it up... you don't really get many opportunities like that."

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"WE'RE ELATED TO PARTNER WITH TORO AND TO TAP INTO AN INDUSTRY LEADER WHO VIEWS PRECISION NOT AS AN IDEAL, BUT A NORM"



COVER STORY

TORO.COM



As a part of an agreement between the PGA of America and Ryder Cup Europe, Toro has been named as the official Turf Maintenance Equipment & Irrigation provider for the Ryder Cup through 2029, including the 45th Ryder Cup, which will be played at Bethpage Black in Farmingdale, New York this September.

Opened in 1936, the Black Course at Bethpage State Park was designed by architect AW Tillinghast and will host the Ryder Cup for the first time in 2025 joining Oak Hill Country Club as the only New York golf courses to host a Ryder Cup.

Bethpage Black did however host the 101st PGA Championship in 2019, and Toro, as an official partner, played a significant role in preparing the course which is regarded as one of the toughest in the US.

"To be selected as the official equipment and irrigation partner for Ryder Cup events is a tremendous honour," commented Rick Olson, Toro Chairman and CEO. "We're thrilled at the opportunity to support golf's pre-eminent biennial team event, which promotes winning on behalf of team and country."

Toro was named the official Turf Maintenance Equipment & Irrigation provider for the Ryder Cup in 2020, and has already helped Whistling Straits, Wisconsin in 2021, and Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, Rome in 2023 stage memorable events, with the United States and Europe winning their respective Ryder Cups on home turf.

As the worldwide leading manufacturer of golf course maintenance equipment and irrigation systems for more than 100 years, The Toro Company has a deep appreciation for golf and its industry, which increasingly prioritises environmental sustainability and performance.

Beyond Bethpage Black, the agreement covers two additional Ryder Cups this decade: 2027, at Adare Manor, County Limerick, Ireland; and 2029 at Hazeltine National Golf Club, Chaska, Minnesota.

"We're elated to partner with Toro and to tap into an industry leader who views precision not as an ideal, but a norm," said PGA of America Chief Commercial Officer, Jeff Price.

"Our symbiotic relationship will target and promote innovation at each of our Ryder Cup sites, both domestically and in Europe, for the rest of the decade."

Speaking in 2020 when the agreement was first signed, Guy Kinnings, CEO of the European Tour Group added: "We are delighted to formalise this agreement with Toro who have been tremendous supporters of both the European Tour and The Ryder Cup on European soil on many occasions, including the memorable contests at The K Club, Celtic Manor and Gleneagles.

"Their level of support and standard of equipment is second to none and we look forward to continuing the relationship across what I am sure will be another decade of memorable Ryder Cup action." **END**

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"AS WE, VERY PROUDLY, REACH 150 EDITIONS OF THE MAGAZINE,
I'VE BEEN LOOKING BACK AND THINKING HOW LUCKY
I'VE BEEN TO BE INVOLVED"

Words David Bowers
Contributing Editor

THANK YOU, 150 TIMES OVER

Thirty-three years ago, I lost my job. During a visit to the local Jobcentre, I spotted an ad from a start-up publishing house that required a sub-editor. I applied, not knowing its specialism, but confident in the knowledge that it's always the same words just in a different order. It turned out that Michael Lenihan – for it was he – was launching a B2B football industry magazine.

As a football fanatic it was manna from heaven for me and I was delighted to be given the job. The magazine proved successful, and Michael and I worked well together. Indeed, as time would tell, we got on so well that we were each best man to the other when we got married... not to each other, obviously.

In 1997, Michael launched Golf Management Europe and asked me to be part of it. Again, I was delighted, but realised I would have to up my 'game' as my knowledge of the sport was not as comprehensive as that of football. Additionally, of course, I would need to improve my playing of the sport, for, unlike football, there would be occasions when I would need to tread the fairways. Sadly, that is where I failed: my golf remains poor, but I can just about get round, sans pocket calculator, without the sun going down.

As we, very proudly, reach 150 editions of the magazine, I've been looking back and thinking how lucky I've been to be involved. It gave me a career in a new sector for me; it helped me gain new skillsets, which I've been able to apply to numerous roles in the last 30 years. During that time, I've been lucky to meet many wonderful people within golf – some of whom have become friends rather than acquaintances – and, also, some of the sport's well-known faces. Some of the well-known faces were wonderful, too... but not all.

I've been privileged to visit many fantastic venues during that time and some – the less risk-averse – even allowed me to play their courses. My golf remained mediocre at best, but my life experience went through the roof, and I'd like to thank everybody who's come into contact with me in that time and made my time with the magazine so enjoyable. I'm still here. My role has changed several times in the last 28 years, but I remain and hope to continue contributing for as long as Michael needs me.

In today's publishing market, surviving for 28 years with a B2B magazine is quite an achievement in any sector, let alone one that was hit so badly by Covid. Other golf publications – both B2B and B2C – have come and gone in that time; I know, because I contributed to some of them. But this one has survived and prospered, which is a heck of an achievement.

But its success is not just down to the vision and determination of Michael Lenihan; it also owes an enormous amount to you, its readers and partners. So, thank you, 150 times over, for helping me to enjoy my career. **END**



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NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



URBANISATION IS DRIVING OUR VISION SAYS CLUB CAR PRESIDENT NATALE

Rapidly increasing urbanisation is driving a shift in mobility needs, and Club Car is responding with vision and innovation, according to the company's Vice President EMEA, Marco Natale. In a new video, Natale, who was recently invited to be part of a roundtable discussion on urban mobility at the World Economic Forum in Davos, explains how Club Car has evolved over its 60-year history from a golf car business to a global leader in sustainable low-speed vehicles.

SEARCH 'CLUB CAR GOLF CLUB' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



CAROUSEL GOLFING IN A SPIN AS RECORD-BREAKING SEASON LOOMS

Carousel Golfing, a company founded by Michael Waldron 27 years ago, has recently unveiled an innovative update to the golf club storage solution that promises to transform the way golf clubs store their equipment. Waldron, a PGA professional and entrepreneur, identified a significant gap in the market in 1998 for efficient and user-friendly storage solutions, leading to the creation of the Carousel Golfing system. Since then, over 200 clubs worldwide have installed the system, helping clubs — and golfers — store their bags in a safe, and secure environment.

SEARCH 'CAROUSEL GOLFING' ONLINE
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BLUEWATER & GEO FOUNDATION JOIN FORCES TO PROMOTE HYDRATION

Bluewater, a global leader in sustainable hydration solutions, has partnered with the international non-profit GEO Sustainable Golf Foundation to advance sustainability in and through golf worldwide. The collaboration aims to tackle single-use plastic pollution while promoting trust in clean drinking water and healthy hydration, aligning with both organisations' vision of protecting the environment and enhancing human well-being. Through this innovative partnership, a portion of every Bluewater refillable bottle sold at golf events and venues worldwide will fund sustainability initiatives in golf.

SEARCH 'BLUEWATER' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



SUSTAINABILITY DRIVING SATISFACTION AT LUNDIN GOLF CLUB

With phase two of Lundin Golf Club's bunker renovation project coming to an end, course manager Gavin Neill is delighted with the impact that EcoBunker technology has had on the course. More surprisingly, he is even more pleased with the motivational effect that the installation is having on his greenkeeping team. "Our most played naturally revetted bunkers needed replacing every two to three years, so the pleasure the team gets from building a bunker that they know will still be around in 20 years can't be overstated," said Neill.

SEARCH 'ECOBUNKER' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



REVAMPED SALGADOS GOLF CLUB ROLLS OUT NEW CLUB CAR FLEET

Salgados Golf Club in Portugal's Algarve region has installed a new fleet of nearly 70 Club Car golf carts as part of a multi-million Euro renovation project. The new Tempo vehicles and drinks buggy from the industry-leading manufacturer of small-wheel, zero-emissions electric vehicles will enhance the experience at the stunning 18-hole resort, which is nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Salgados Lagoon Nature Reserve.

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TORO IRRIGATION DELIVERS IMMEDIATE RESULTS FOR ROYAL ST DAVID'S

The new Toro irrigation system at Royal St David's has brought almost immediate changes and noticeable results to the traditional links course on the west coast of North Wales. The project involving Toro, Reesink Hydro-Scapes, Adrian Mortram Associates and Green Irrigation has increased membership, income and ranking for the club. Links Manager Rhys Butler says: "The goal was to irrigate just the right amount to keep the grass alive, we wanted to promote the fast-running links game, without overwatering and having soft surfaces."

SEARCH 'TORO IRRIGATION' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ROYAL ASCOT TRIALS ROBOT MOWERS TO ENHANCE GREENKEEPING OPERATION

A fleet of robotic mowers which reduces carbon emissions and enhances greenkeeping capabilities is being trialled at Royal Ascot Golf Club as part of its development strategy. The Winkfield Road venue introduced BigMow technology to its 150 acre wooded Crown land course this week with a view to further enhancing the playing quality and experience of members and visitors alike. Each mower is capable of cutting rough, semi-rough and fairway patches of ground for two hours using GPS technology, can operate in all weather conditions and will save an estimated five tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

SEARCH 'BIGMOW' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ENTRIES OPEN FOR TORO STUDENT GREENKEEPER OF THE YEAR 2025 AWARDS

Entries for Toro's renowned Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards 2025 open on March 1. Lecturers and employers can give their students the chance to unlock life changing opportunities by nominating them, or student greenkeepers can have faith in their own abilities and put themselves forward.

SEARCH 'TORO STUDENT' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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GLORIA GOLF RESORT TO HOST WORLD'S BIGGEST CORPORATE GOLF EVENT

Gloria Hotels & Resorts has extended a successful partnership with Turkish Airlines to span the next two editions of the Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup. Officially the largest reaching corporate event in the sport, the 2025 and 2026 Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup will be sponsored once again by Gloria Hotels & Resorts, who will also host the final of both seasons. 2024's tournament saw 20,000 golfers play in 112 events in 68 countries, putting some of golf's most talented amateurs in the spotlight while promoting Turkish hospitality on a global scale.

SEARCH 'GLORIA GOLF RESORT' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



59CLUB WELCOMES PEDRO BIBILONI ISO AS NEW OPERATIONS MANAGER

59club Europe South has announced the appointment of Pedro Bibiloni Iso as its new Operations Manager. Iso brings over a decade of experience in hotels, golf, and hospitality, along with a deep passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. His extensive knowledge and commitment to service excellence will be instrumental in supporting 59club Europe South's continued growth and success. Expressing his excitement about joining the team, Iso said: "I am excited to embark on this new chapter as Operations Manager at 59club Europe South."

SEARCH 'PEDRO BIBILONI ISO' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ISEKI PRESENTED WITH AWARD FOR EXCELLENT BUSINESS GROWTH

ISEKI UK & Ireland won the Excellent Business Growth Award at the ISEKI Awards Convention after more than doubling sales in the last seven years. Presented by the President of ISEKI, Mr Tomiyasu and General Manager for International Business, Kazuya Tani, the award recognised the outstanding work done by the entire ISEKI UK & Ireland team, whose work has seen them gain the most growth and market share of any country in the world.

SEARCH 'ISEKI' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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DUBAI GOLF STRENGTHENS LEADERSHIP WITH TWO KEY APPOINTMENTS

Dubai Golf has announced key leadership changes at two of its flagship venues. Stephen Hubner has been appointed as the new Club Manager of Emirates Golf Club, while Dan Naudo joins as the Club Manager of Jumeirah Golf Estates. Hubner, who has been with Dubai Golf for nearly 19 years, brings extensive experience from his time within the group and a thorough understanding of the region's golf operations to his new role at Emirates Golf Club. Naudo brings considerable experience managing high-profile golf and leisure facilities in the UK and the Middle East.

SEARCH 'DUBAI GOLF' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



THE R&A SUSTAINABLE AGRONOMY SERVICE PARTNER WITH WEST CLIFFS

West Cliffs Golf Links in Portugal has partnered with The R&A Sustainable Agronomy Service to enhance its commitment to environmentally sustainable golf course management. This collaboration will see The R&A share its global expertise and cutting-edge research with West Cliffs, providing tailored guidance on sustainable agronomic practices. Key areas of focus include optimising resource management, improving soil health, and promoting biodiversity while maintaining exceptional playing conditions.

SEARCH 'WEST CLIFFS' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



PRINCE'S GOLF CLUB SET TO HOST PRESTIGIOUS HAGEN54 EVENT

Prince's Golf Club has announced its involvement as a host venue for The Hagen54, a unique and historic challenge celebrating the legendary Jim Barnes and Walter Hagen's famous three-course feat in Kent. Taking place July 23 - 24, 2025, the Hagen54 will showcase the iconic links of Royal Cinque Ports, Royal St. George's and Prince's Golf Club, delivering an unforgettable 54-hole experience for participants in one day.

SEARCH 'HAGEN54' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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NEW DESTINATION WORLDCLASS.GOLF



Part of Portugal's golfing heritage, the Old Course at Vilamoura has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf – a portfolio of the world's premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

Affectionately known as the "Grande Dame," the Old Course at Vilamoura stands as the second oldest course in the Algarve, boasting a legacy of over 50 years that continues to attract golfers from around the world.

Under the new management of DETAILS, a company wholly owned by Arrow Global, the course underwent substantial renovations in 2024, enhancing its bunkers, tees, and greens while integrating sustainability-driven improvements.

A key highlight of this transformation is the reopening of the clubhouse, now reflecting a seamless blend of timeless sophistication

and a refreshed brand identity that honours its rich heritage.

The space has been extensively renovated, with notable upgrades to the pro shop, locker rooms, exterior areas, and dining facilities. Among these enhancements is a British-inspired gastropub paying tribute to Frank Pennink, the visionary architect behind the course.

Following an in-person site appraisal in February 2025, Michael Lenihan, CEO of worldclass.golf said: "I last visited the Old Course at Vilamoura in 2017, and the changes that DETAILS have implemented since acquiring the property have been nothing short of spectacular.

"The visitor experience is comfortably one of the very best in the Algarve, and I had no hesitation in extending an invitation to join the portfolio for 2025 and beyond." **END**

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MARK DARBON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THE R&A



There's an adage that states: originality is simply a pair of fresh eyes. And the appointment of Mark Darbon, as chief executive of the R&A certainly brings fresh eyes.

Until he took up the post in late 2024, 45-year-old Darbon had never worked in golf. But, if any traditionalists out there are starting to get their tweeds in a tangle, he's certainly not one for 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'.

Fresh from guiding rugby union's Northampton Saints to their first Gallagher Premiership title in ten years – in a near eight-year tenure as CEO – Darbon swapped Northampton for St Andrews.

He explained: "If you look at the typical tenure for a CEO in an elite sport club, I'd been at Saints longer than average. But I was really enjoying it, and we were making good progress on and off the pitch.

"I certainly wasn't actively looking, but this was the type of opportunity that, when you hear about it, is very hard to look beyond. I was excited as soon as I got the call from the recruitment firm the R&A used."

It was no surprise the agency had Darbon on speed-dial. His record in sport is impressive, entering the sector in 2009, when he left drinks giant Diageo, to, ultimately, occupy the position of head of Olympic Park operations for the 2012 London Olympics.

Following the resounding success of the event, he served as an advisor to the International Olympic Committee, from 2013 to 2018, while holding down full-time roles elsewhere. He joined Tough Mudder Americas, in New York, as senior VP for two years, before climbing into the saddle as CEO at

cycling promoter Madison Sports Group, for another two-year stint.

The Saints came calling in 2017 and he introduced a commercial strategy which turned the club around and achieved record revenues in consecutive seasons.

The Oxford University alumnus also remains a non-executive director of Northampton Saints and England Hockey. Fresh eyes, indeed.

He said: "I believe, through my career, I've developed a skillset well suited to the brief at the R&A. I've done a lot on the commercial side of sports. Clearly, we need ensure to ensure the Open Championship is at the pinnacle of our sport – it's much more than just one of golf's Majors. It's one of the global sporting events that really matters.

"I've been involved – through the Olympics and other events – in staging big global events, so I understand the operational side of those propositions and what goes into making them as seamless as possible. That's a big part of what we do on the biggest stage with the Open and the AIG Women's Open, but also through other events we're staging around the world."

Those skills will also be required to address the fractured relationships within the professional game and the consistently thorny issue of participation, particularly encouraging and retaining younger golfers.

And he's already started with the recent announcement of a new category to enable players competing in LIV Golf to earn a place in The Open. Darbon said: "I've done quite a lot in terms of stakeholder relations and one of the things that has struck me



"ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS STRUCK ME ABOUT GOLF IS QUITE HOW FRAGMENTED THE SPORT IS"

about golf is quite how fragmented the sport is. I used to think rugby was quite fragmented, but at all levels – international, regional, national – golf is extremely fragmented. So, the ability to build the right relationships, and manage some of those stakeholders effectively is important.

"If you think about our remit and how that matters to young people, there's a good few things we can do. The first pillar, here at the R&A, is inspiration. I'm a big believer that there are very few sports that really thrive from a participation perspective, unless the shop window – the very top of the game – is strong.

"And I think it's undeniable the shop window in golf has not been as strong, recently, as it could be. So, I'm eager for us to work with the stakeholders around the game to try to evolve that. But there's lots more we can do below that, because the second pillar, then, is all around participation.

"One of our responsibilities is to break down barriers to participation, particularly for young people. The trend in participation around the world has been positive. Basically, in the territories we orchestrate, there are more than 60 million people playing the game of golf.

"Roughly a third of those are not playing every week, but they're engaging in the sport in other ways, and we should be proud of the work we've done in that space. At the same time, I find it concerning that in a list of sports, ranked by engagement, golf does not feature in the top 30 for Gen Z adults.

"We've got some work to do around how we break down barriers for young people to get them into the sport and then, importantly, keep them. And that's not a new challenge. Rugby, tennis, and cricket – to some extent – have the same challenge, and we're all competing in a marketplace where young people have lots of things they can be doing."

One activity young people have traditionally participated in during the last 70-odd years is watching live sport on TV – originally on terrestrial TV. How many of us became engaged with – and inspired by – golf, for example, by watching the exploits of Nicklaus, Palmer, Faldo, Ballesteros, and Woods?

And, the recent news that LIV Golf will be available, in 2025, to watch in the UK on free-to-air ITV, might add to the clamour to see the Open return to terrestrial TV.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, given his sharp commercial mind, Darbon is not committing the R&A to the Open's return to the BBC. Darbon explained: "If you look at the UK, we're really proud of the coverage we have with Sky and I believe there are as many people watching the Open now as when we first took the proposition behind the paywall.

"I don't think it's as simple, necessarily, as terrestrial TV equals more engagement. At the same time, it's our responsibility to ensure all elements of our Open content are appealing to the different audiences they serve.

"It's a fact that lots of young people are not sitting down and watching four-hour long broadcasts of a final round," he admits.

"So, one of our key questions is how do we package up other aspects of our content, serve that appropriately through different channels, to capture the hearts and minds of different aspects of our audiences, and then, on the back of that, run programmes that capture that excitement, that inspiration, and enable us to drag people into the game?

"I think there's lots we do effectively already, but there are some opportunities for us to do more on that front."

Marketing gurus like to use the descriptor 'disruptive' for somebody who uses innovative and unexpected ways to stand out from competitors, and the term has been used to describe Darbon. But, like a tightrope walker heading from tee to green at the 16th on Vale do Lobo's Royal Course, the three handicapper realises balance is essential.

He added: "One of the things I'm really excited about is how do we continue to preserve the wonderful history and heritage our sport – and the R&A – has, while also being innovative, proactive, and on the front foot, to ensure the sport is in a better place for future generations.

"At Northampton Saints, we used to talk a lot about the history and heritage of the club while also saying we were one of the most innovative clubs out there. I'm excited by how you use history and heritage to help you be progressive for the future.

"I don't see those things as being in competition because our rich history and heritage gives us such a strong platform from which to operate. It validates a lot of our activity around the world, and that's exciting." **END**





Words Michael Lenihan
Online troon.com

DJ FLANDERS

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT, TROON



When one is granted an audience with one of the most powerful figures in the golf industry it's understandable to enter the conversation with a pre-conceived notion of the sort of personality to be encountered.

As executive vice-president of Troon International, Louisiana-born DJ Flanders could almost be forgiven for oozing a sense of self-importance. To discover he's down-to-earth, affable, and modest is refreshing — few people at the top of any international sport are quite as personable.

Just a swift perusal of his LinkedIn profile shows a career path which demonstrates he's certainly not a 'stupid' Flanders. This is a guy who's gone from 27-year-old assistant golf pro to executive vice-president of Troon, in less than 25 years.

So, where better to start an interview with a single-word question: how?

"I did have aspirations to play professionally, but I found out, very quickly, that it wasn't the right fit for me," he smiled.

"It was my own fault. I didn't have the work ethic, as there were too many distractions. I was a pretty good high school player, and I had opportunities to go play college golf at Mississippi State University. Thankfully, MSU also had the professional golf management programme, an accredited programme by the PGA of America. And I found out the business side of things was going to be better for me from a career standpoint."

And he was correct in that assumption. Joining Troon was, also, a step in the right direction, providing a platform for his talents and developing him into an asset in his own right.

He recalled: "I was very fortunate to start very early in my career at The Westin La Cantera Resort & Spa, in Texas, which was a Troon property. Back at that time, third-party management was not very popular, and I think we only had about ten golf courses within the Troon network at that time.

"But it was great for me, as a young student just out of college, to come into a company with that much structure to learn the standards, the policies, and the procedures — how to do things at a high-end facility, very early on in my career. And, obviously, it opened up a ton of career opportunities for me to be able to climb the ladder.

"If you had told me, coming out of college, I'd be running the international division for Troon, I would've laughed at you. But because I worked for Troon, I was given that opportunity. I feel very blessed and very thankful for that."

Jumping from his first position to his current role in a few sentences, glosses over a hugely impressive CV. Eighteen months into his career he was appointed director of golf at the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa, in Scottsdale, before, in 2004, he moved abroad for the first time — to Japan and the Phoenix Country Club, in Miyazaki.

He then went on to work at marquee Troon properties in Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, with a spell back in the US, on Long Island, sandwiched in between. Now aged 52, he's based in Dubai, and he's grateful for all the opportunities Troon has afforded him.

He said: "I went from Kierland to running five golf courses in Japan, and I was a very young professional at that time.



"WE REALLY BELIEVE WE PUT A LOT OF TIME INTO OUR ASSOCIATES TO BUILD THEM UP TO THE LEADERS THEY ARE TODAY"

"I would never have had that international opportunity or, most likely a multiple facility opportunity at that age, at a different company. And to be honest, I wouldn't have been ready for it.

"But with the way Troon is structured, I had the support of some very talented individuals behind me who make sure I succeeded. So, I was able to take that jump with the knowledge I could be successful with the support of Troon, even though I was on the other side of the world.

"Throughout my whole career, I wish I could say it was all based on my talent; but I've succeeded because I have all that talent behind me, is the way I've always looked at it."

Naturally, language barriers were, initially, an issue abroad, but his life experiences had set him up to take such scenarios in his stride. "I was a military brat," he explained.

"My dad was a colonel in the army, so I would change homes every six months. And I was always kind of comfortable being uncomfortable. When you submerge yourself in a language like I did in Japan, you pick it up quite quickly."

The change of role, early in his career, meant opportunities to work further afield came thick and fast and he was accompanied on his travels by wife Debbi, and sons Maverick – who last year joined Troon as accountant at its Birmingham, Alabama office – and Ace.

Flanders said: "Look at my CV and you'd think I'm running from the law, but my role was a 'turnaround' guy. I was always 'come in, turn it around' and then hand it over to another general manager. I got in a niche where it was three years and I would leave, but not necessarily.

"We're very transparent about opportunities within Troon and we like to hire and promote from within. And when you have a culture like that, people have transparency on jobs and they see areas of the world that they want to go to, they put their hand up.

"So, yeah, we do tend to move around a little bit, but it's by choice. It's not like truly moving people; it's people putting their hands up and saying, 'I'd really like that opportunity.'

"We really believe we put a lot of time into our associates to build them up to the leaders they are today, and then we want to give

them opportunities and support them to be successful."

Looking ahead, Flanders will be one of the driving forces behind Troon's continued expansion into Asia and Europe, regions into which they've previously only dipped the corporate toe. He admitted: "They've been tough markets for us to crack, but most of it was self-induced.

"I think we were going after those markets with fee structures that didn't make sense for the client. And I think as a company, we had more of a McDonald's model where it was: this is who we are, take it or leave it.

"We've changed dramatically since then and we've become more of a toolbox of services. And we're much more flexible on our pricing. I think with that model, we're going to have much more success.

"If you look back at Troon from an acquisition standpoint over the last couple of years, I think we're up to 900 facilities, give or take. A lot of that has come through acquisitions and through that we've acquired multiple brands. So now we're able to be flexible and provide different services under these different brands and then charge different fees for that.

"We've become more client focused where we say what does the client need? What are the services we can provide? And then what is a fair fee that we can charge so we can exceed their expectations?

"We haven't been able to grow the portfolio up to 900 properties by not being able to retain contracts. We're not a five-and-dime company. We have a very high client satisfaction rating.

"I think Japan is a market we're going to see is open for some help, particularly driving golf tourism. We're starting to see the same thing in Korea."

If, like me, you're wondering what the DJ stands for, your intrepid reporter was not afraid to go there.

Flanders smiled: "David, Jonathan... I've been DJ from day one. It's a challenge when you go to Asia because they don't really like the initials. And I can't tell you how many times I check into a hotel and disappoint the check-in because they thought I was a DJ. Look at me. 'You're not a DJ!'. And I'm, like, no, I'm not."

He might not be a DJ but he's certainly responsible for many excellent tracks. **END**

RUSSELL HANNAH

VICE-PRESIDENT OF GOLF, IMG



Most successful people in life can reference someone who has made a significant impact on their career, and often, their personal life too.

For many, it can be a parent, or a grandparent, but for 45-year-old Russell Hannah – who began his career at Turnberry on the west coast of Scotland – it appears to be Paul Burley who has helped shape the affable Scotsman's life to date.

Hannah's golf career took off at Turnberry, where he was part of the PGA Management programme from 2000 to 2004, working full-time alongside 12 other PGA pros, all at various stages of their training.

This environment was not only competitive but also provided a solid foundation for Hannah's career in golf as he recalls: "It was good fun, but it was also competitive. We were always trying to outdo each other in the PGA exams and playing as well.

"But it was a good environment, and I had a good mentor in Paul Burley who was the director of golf at the time."

Despite his love for golf, Hannah realised early on that his strengths lay more in the business and management side of the sport rather than playing or teaching. This realisation led him to focus on golf operations and management at Turnberry, a decision that was influenced by Burley who would later become Hannah's boss at IMG.

"Paul has been a great mentor and I've learned a lot from him," said Hannah. "He's still our senior vice president at IMG based in Singapore, and still my direct boss."

After completing his PGA qualifications, Hannah continued to work at Turnberry and

spent the last four years as golf operations manager, leaving just after Stewart Cink broke most golf fans hearts by defeating Tom Watson in a play-off at the 138th Open Championship.

In 2010, Hannah made a significant career move to Mauritius, where he took on the role of general manager at Le Touessrok – an IMG venue – with the move facilitated by Burley, who had earlier returned to IMG to head up their golf course management division.

His tenure at Le Touessrok – which has subsequently been renamed Ile Aux Cerfs – lasted almost three years and is a part of his life which he looks back on with fond memories having settled into island life.

"We loved it. My wife settled there really well – she was a teacher – so she was working at the local school and had her own group of friends and was keeping herself busy. Our [first] daughter was born there as well, so we kind of got into life and loved it. Loved every minute of it.

"One of the challenges with Le Touessrok was that although it was a brilliant course, for a resort course it was tough. There were lots of rocky outcrops, with lots of trees and vegetation and the greens were quite small so we set about softening it a lot, to try and make it more playable."

Hannah's next career move took him back to the UK, where he joined IMG's corporate office in London in 2013. As the head of IMG's golf course management division for Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, Hannah answered a call – again from Paul Burley – to oversee various projects.





"ACROSS IMG, WE'VE ALWAYS FOCUSED ON BEING THE BEST, RATHER THAN THE BIGGEST"

Reflecting on the relocation from an idyllic island in the middle of the Indian Ocean to London, Hannah says: "I'd always wanted to work for IMG, as it's a great company, with a great reputation and a great brand, and I just felt that the timing was right."

"I also felt that there was an opportunity to really grow the business, as at the time, we only had two courses in Nigeria and that was a great starting point. We were the leaders in the Asia Pacific region, but hadn't really started in Europe or Africa, plus it was an opportunity to work with Paul again," he admits.

With IMG head office in Chiswick, Hannah and his young family based themselves in Richmond, eventually moving back to the west coast of Scotland six years later due to the cost of living in the capital.

"We loved Richmond," he recalls, "but it is just too expensive. We just so happened to choose the most expensive spot to live in, and then we couldn't see anything past Richmond – it was either Richmond or nothing," he laughs.

"So, when we realised we couldn't buy a house in Richmond, we thought why not move back up to Scotland?"

Now the proud parent of two girls aged 10 and 12, Hannah enjoys the diversity and challenges that come with managing golf courses in different markets across the EMEA and APAC regions.

He finds the pre-opening phase of projects particularly exciting and appreciates the opportunity to grow the business and work with a variety of clients.

"I enjoy what I do, and I think I'm quite suited to it as well," he says. "I enjoy developing the business, and the ability to grow the business and get the positives from that."

"And I enjoy all the different experiences of working in different markets, whether it's in the Philippines, Saudi Arabia or Europe. We've even got courses in Iraq, and I've spent time in Nigeria. So, I think the diversity of it, the ability to grow the business... that's exciting, as too is the pre-opening work of a project, which is something you don't really get in club management."

His career has been marked by a strong focus on quality and building lasting relationships with clients. IMG's boutique approach to golf course management allows Hannah and his team to provide personalised and high-quality services to their destinations.

This approach has led to long-term management contracts and a reputation for excellence in the industry.

"Across IMG, we've always focused on being the best, rather than the biggest," he claims. "We are a boutique operator and currently have 20 to 25 projects."

"Of course we'd love to grow the business, but we're never going to be 200, 300 plus venues, and because of that, I think we're able to service our projects really well," he admits.

Looking ahead, Hannah sees significant growth opportunities in the Middle East and Asia Pacific regions. With ongoing projects in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East, as well as a strong presence in Asia, he is optimistic about the future of golf in these markets.

He also believes that there is still potential for growth in Europe and the UK, despite the challenges posed by the established golf management model in these regions.

"Typically, in Europe, a lot of clubs will do it themselves, and they'll find their own GMs and their own golf directors," he states. "There's a lot of good talent in the UK and Europe, including Spain and Portugal, so I guess it's up to us to make sure that we let owners and clients know the benefits that IMG can bring to their business."

"If we look at some of the things that do work in Europe, we know that agronomy is strong with lots of project's serviced by agronomy companies. We can also see that there is work there for sales and marketing agencies and partners, but less for when it comes to management."

On a personal note, Hannah continues to enjoy playing golf, albeit less frequently than he would prefer. He finds that playing golf now, without the pressure of being a PGA pro, allows him to enjoy the game more and even play better. "I actually find that being more relaxed, you actually play better," he smiles.

And perhaps, it is this relaxed attitude to life which may one day see Hannah succeed his mentor, Paul Burley in Singapore although at present, relocation to the Far East appears not to be on his radar.

"Moving for us at the moment would be difficult, what with our parents getting older, and two kids at school. But in the future, I wouldn't rule it out, and Asia is going to be a growth area for us." **END**



Words Christopher Stratford
Online players1st.com

MORTEN BISGAARD

CEO, PLAYERS 1ST



The golf course has long been fabled as a recreational area that some view as an open air office, where big business deals are formulated and finessed then settled on a handshake.

Morten Bisgaard and Jacob Buksted embellished the reputation when they walked the fairways together and created not merely a contract, but a company that has since spread to 20 different countries from their native Denmark.

Players 1st was launched in 2012 to provide golf club managers with access to an online platform that helps steer them towards making informed decisions, including about how to boost both retention and recruitment numbers among their membership.

Bisgaard and his fellow CEO and co-founder of Players 1st, Buksted, had quit their jobs with a major consultancy company having built the framework of an idea for taking advantage of the then burgeoning landscape of cloud software.

"If you go back to 2012, 2013 that's when cloud software was just in the beginning and everything was done on paper," says Bisgaard.

"When we were out working at a client we were basically selling reports, PDFs, and if you want to change a comma in that we have to go back and we charge you by the hour and that's how it was done.

"What we wanted to do was make it more in the moment and digital, use the cloud technology to make it easier to manage, but also make it more efficient so you would be able to do surveys more often."

A six-month non-compete exit clause saw them with a lot of time on their hands. "What did we do? We went out and played golf," laughs the now 46-year-old, who says he came into the sport very late, "but I love it – and I hate it."

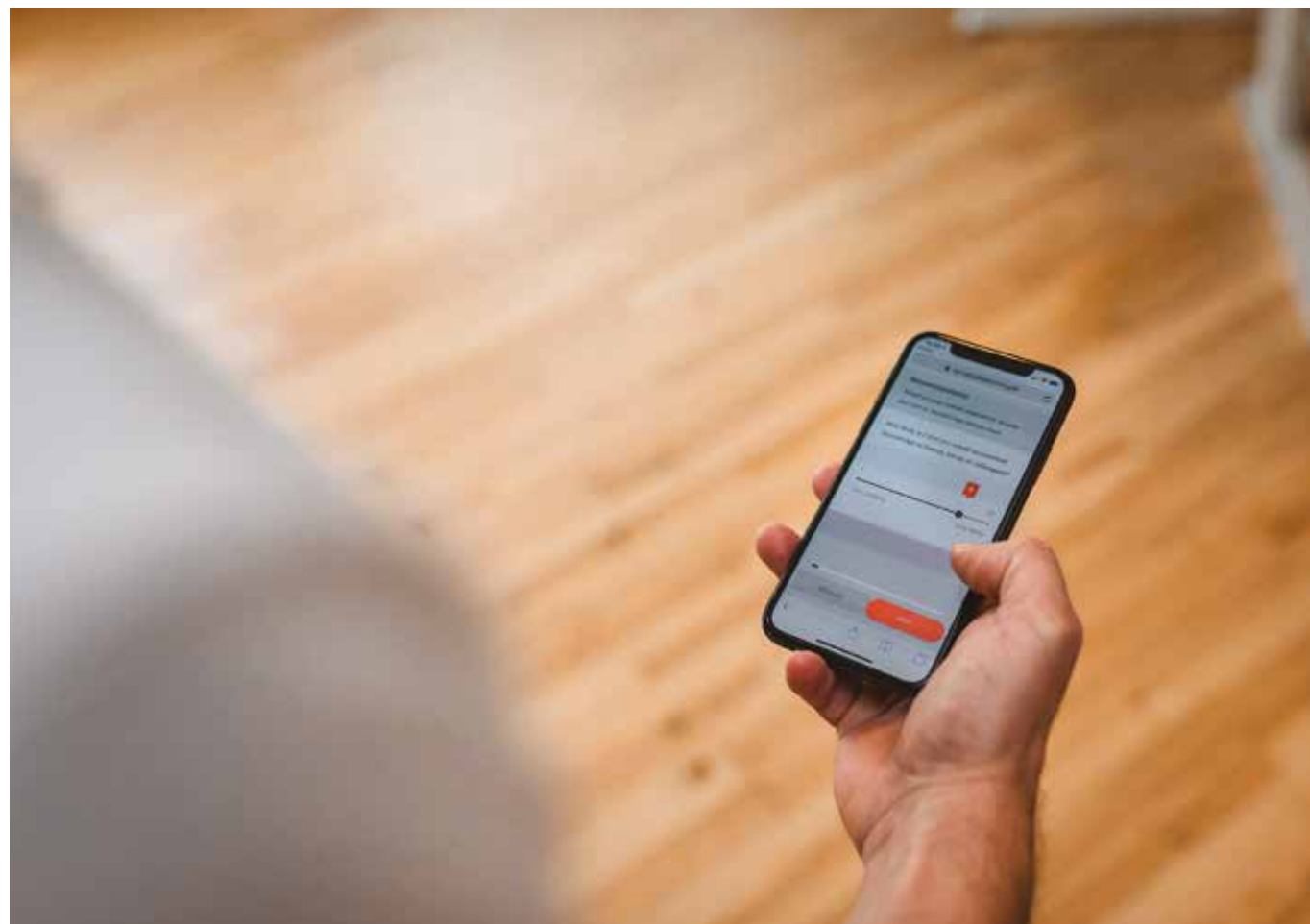
He continues: "Then we came up with the idea at the golf course. Hmm, so what we've been looking at here is for small to medium size businesses. What if we did that in the golf industry? "What if we combine our professional skills with our personal passion?"

Players 1st was born and the pair's zeal for their business model quickly helped persuade the Danish Golf Union to commit to an initial four-year partnership, during the first year of which the union financially assisted development of a management solution platform that now has over 10,000 users.

"We gave Morten Backhausen, their CEO, a complete cold call to say 'we have an idea, we have tested it in our local golf course with a spreadsheet and a monthly subscription and we can actually see it works, can we come pitch you an idea?' Three months later we had a four-year contract with the union about implementing Players 1st in all Danish golf courses."

Through word of mouth, their success in Denmark spread "to Finland, from Finland to Norway and to England, Scotland and also the US," recalls Bisgaard, who reveals that their current 3,000-strong client base is projected to grow by a further one thousand this year.

The engine that has driven this rapid growth is a system that uses the data from



“EVERYONE WANTS TO BELONG TO A TRIBE AND FOR ME THAT’S WHERE CLUBS SHOULD INVEST MUCH MORE GOING FORWARD”

forensically sculpted surveys to allow golf club managers to make educated decisions in all areas.

An on-line dashboard provides visual emphasis and clarification with the bonus that its output is updated immediately when a set of survey results is input.

While some aspects emerge that are specific to individual clubs, two common factors have been extrapolated from over 10 million surveys involving more than 3.5 million golfers: retention of members proves more beneficial than recruitment, and the social vibrancy of a club is more important to most members than a course’s condition.

“If you have a fantastic club there’s no better ambassadors than your members. They will go out and advocate for you,” says Bisgaard, alluding to retention over recruitment.

On the often neglected social benefits of golf club membership, he reasons: “If you gave the average golf course manager £100,000 and said, ‘hey, go and spend that wisely’, they will probably go and build a new green or fix a green or something around the course or maybe a new bunker.

“But it is really not the way you get most value for that money. It is in creating the environment around the club, getting members to belong.

“If it’s a nice place to be and if you get them hooked socially to the club it doesn’t matter about the green or the bunker, the quality of that, as long as it’s okay. But it doesn’t have to be world-class.

“Everyone wants to belong to a tribe and for me that’s where clubs should invest much more going forward as the amount of money you need to invest in order to create a great club environment is nothing compared to fixing the green.

“We’ve launched a partnership with England Golf in order to build the biggest financial benchmarking platform in England, so you can have an idea about how you’re performing against your peers, both revenue wise but also cost wise.”

Although price scaled for its original target market of low-and mid-level clubs, Players 1st number the majority of the world’s Top 100 clubs among their client portfolio.

Bisgaard has always been bewitched by numbers. “I was a bit of a math nerd growing up,” he concedes. “My first job was in the Danish Ministry of Finance.

“There is kind of a thread in my first job and in my current job because when I started out you would get maybe a 200-page report and you had to narrow it down to one page for the minister.

“From day one I’ve been working on simplifying or taking out the essentials in complex data sets and presenting them in an intuitive way.

“As an entrepreneur and engineer, you always want to tell about the formula that’s behind it and how you made this complex solution very simple. But when you get past that, it’s super satisfying that it works. Then you can always talk to your engineer friends about what technique you are using and why this is so fantastic.”

His understanding wife and eight-and ten-year-old daughters indulge his passion for golf by accepting his extension of every business trip by a day, during which he endeavours to play a new course before returning home.

In recent years he has become one of many converts to padel tennis, saying: “Padel gives newcomers immediate access to the sport. You don’t have to learn to play, you don’t have to be a member of a club.

“You can just go into a website, book an hour, there will be equipment, balls out on the court that you can just borrow for free, and you can just go and try it out. We see a lot of golf courses here that are building padel courts.”

His admiration for golf club managers is huge – “I don’t think I ever met anyone more busy than golf course managers. There is always some urgency somewhere” – and he is gratified that Players 1st can ease their burden.

Of his own job, he comments: “When I’m asked about what I do, I always end up feeling very blessed, but also humble about the situation I’m in. I truly believe I have the world’s best job. I’m able to travel the world, work with some fantastic people and play golf at the best golf courses in the world. What’s not to like?” **END**

SAUJANA GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

SAUJANAGOLF.COM.MY

Words Michael Lenihan

Location Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Step into a realm where luxury meets championship golf at The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur and Saujana Golf & Country Club in Malaysia.

Featuring two 18-hole golf courses – the Palm and Bunga Raya – Saujana Golf & Country Club (SGCC) has consistently been

voted Malaysia's No. 1 Golf Club and is one of the 100 Best Golf Resorts in the world.

Nestled within a sprawling 160-acre tropical sanctuary, The Saujana Resort stands as an epitome of refined elegance.





ONE OF ITS HOLES, THE 172-YARD, PAR 3 SECOND HOLE, IS RATED AS THE MOST DIFFICULT HOLE IN MALAYSIA

Whether you are a passionate golfer seeking an elite-level challenge or a leisure traveller in pursuit of a five-star retreat, the exclusive Stay & Play packages on offer provide the perfect synthesis of world-class golf and premium hospitality.

Home to two of Malaysia's most revered championship courses, SGCC has earned a distinguished reputation as a premier venue for prestigious international tournaments, including multiple editions of the Malaysian Open, Maybank Championship and other globally recognised golf championships.

With its rich legacy of hosting some of the world's greatest players, this esteemed golf resort beckons those who appreciate the finer aspects of the game.

Saujana Golf & Country Club proudly boasts two meticulously designed 18-hole championship courses – each crafted to test, challenge, and inspire golfers of all levels.

The Palm Course – nicknamed 'The Cobra' for its testing and challenging layout – is 6,992-yards from the black tees, and is well known to golfers in Malaysia and the region. One of its holes, the 172-yard, par 3 second hole, is rated as the most difficult hole in Malaysia.

Known for its tight, undulating fairways and treacherous greens, 'The Cobra' is a course that demands precision, strategy, and exceptional shot-making ability. It has been a proving ground for professional golfers on the European and Asian Tours, pushing even the most seasoned players to their limits.

Renowned for its fast greens and strategically placed hazards, 'The Cobra' offers an exhilarating challenge that rewards bold play and unwavering focus.

The Bunga Raya Course – nicknamed 'The Crocodile' – is a stunning yet unforgiving course featuring water hazards, meandering streams, and challenging bunker placements. With its rolling fairways and immaculate greens, it presents a test of skill, patience, and course management.

Consisting of wide expanses of water and undulating greenery that creates a sense of freedom and space, it is 7,034-yards in length and looks deceptively easy with many players who have regretted underestimating it.

The course recently underwent major re-routing and reconstruction offering a new layout designed by Parslow & Winter Golf Design. The upgrading features top of range golf course technology, Bermuda 419 fairways and Mini Verde Greens.

Beyond the fairways, The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur redefines luxury with its 355 elegantly appointed rooms and suites, all designed to provide a serene escape amid lush greenery.

Guests can indulge in sophisticated comfort, with each room offering modern amenities, plush furnishings, and breathtaking views of the resort's natural landscape.

The hotel's commitment to excellence extends beyond its accommodations. Culinary aficionados will delight in an array of gourmet dining options, including Senja – An exquisite Italian restaurant offering fine dining with scenic lakeside views and Charcoal – A sophisticated grill house serving premium cuts and local delicacies.

Ti Chen – An authentic Chinese restaurant featuring Cantonese and Szechuan specialties adds some regional flair.

For those seeking relaxation, Thalgo Spa offers a rejuvenating retreat with signature treatments and holistic wellness therapies. Guests can also enjoy access to state-of-the-art resort facilities, including a fully equipped fitness centre, swimming pool, and tennis courts.

The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur and Saujana Golf & Country Club present an unrivalled fusion of golfing prestige, luxury accommodation, and five-star hospitality.

Whether you are here for a weekend golf escape, a corporate retreat, or a memorable holiday with friends, every detail is meticulously crafted to ensure a flawless stay and play experience.

With its illustrious championship history, breathtaking natural surroundings, and uncompromising commitment to excellence, SGCC and The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur remain the ultimate destination for golfers seeking an elite sporting getaway.

Discover the perfect synergy of world-class golf and five-star luxury at Saujana Golf & Country Club & The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur – where every moment on and off the course is an experience to remember. **END**



Words Pete Simm
Online basingstokegolfclub.co.uk

DAVID GREEN

GENERAL MANAGER, BASINGSTOKE GOLF CLUB



With the rich, long histories that so many golf clubs rightly take pride in, it's rare that the opportunity comes along to truly start afresh.

But barely a year into the post of general manager at Basingstoke Golf Club, that's the position David Green finds himself in. For three decades, Green's career has taken him to some of southern England's most picturesque countryside spots, with stints in Kent, Surrey, the New Forest... and now, on the edge of the North Downs.

"I hadn't really heard about the project until June 2023 – they'd kept it really quiet," said Green. "Prior to this I'd spoken to a few recruitment agencies like Timberlake Golf and Colt Mackenzie McNair to give them an idea of what I was looking for, but it was Scott Patience Consultancy that managed the recruitment process."

Managers move around to take new jobs all the time – but unusually, in this case, the club itself had recently relocated. In 2021, Basingstoke Golf Club made the move to a new site in the village of Dummer, acquiring the land that once belonged to Dummer Golf Club.

While the change was geographically minute – just 400 metres – it signalled the start of a hugely ambitious plan. Dummer's existing 18-hole course was to be completely redesigned, a state-of-the-art clubhouse constructed, and high-tech practice facilities developed. As projects go, it was as close to starting completely from scratch as most general managers will ever get.

Work began on the course in 2022 and, a year later, Green was appointed to oversee

one of the UK's most exciting golf projects in recent years. That was how he found himself in the uncommon position of managing a course that technically didn't exist yet.

He said: "I started in November 2023 and had a really positive six-month period learning about the project, the club and its current structure and then supporting Kanda Golf with creating and readying a new governance structure for the new operating company to take on when it was time.

"Still, it was hard waiting for the course to be ready – it looked brilliant, but nobody could play it yet. I was longing for the spring to come so we could see some growth, and then to see our members start to enjoy some of the new course."

Though Basingstoke is Green's second role as general manager, his background is as a PGA pro, dating back to a spell as assistant professional at Princes Golf Club in Kent in the mid-1990s. In fact, golf was once his tertiary sport before Greg Norman's 1993 Open Championship win at Royal St George's – a tournament the locally-raised Green was working at – sparked a newfound passion.

"That just gave me a completely different outlook on the game," he explained. "I had been a member at Princes since I was nine – a fabulous place to play, but golf wasn't really my thing. Rugby and cricket were more my style, and golf became a pastime.

"But when I worked The Open in '93, I saw the buzz about it for the first time. I was quite good without really trying – the pro at Princes even asked me if I had considered taking it up professionally.



"BEFORE, THE CLUB WAS A REALLY PLEASANT PARKLAND GOLF COURSE, OF WHICH THERE ARE HUNDREDS IF NOT THOUSANDS IN THE UK"

"Four months into my A-levels, I thought: 'I'm not enjoying this, let's give golf a go'. I turned pro aged 18 and I haven't looked back since."

After getting playing experience on the Challenge Tour, Green taught at venues including Tandridge and Wildernesse and was director of golf at Farnham Park and Croham Hurst but, like so many in the industry and beyond, things have looked rather different since the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Covid gave me the opportunity to get out and hit the reset button, so I spent 12 months not really working," he said. "I did a bit of coaching locally but really spent that time trying to work out what I wanted to do and reflect on what had been an interesting and exciting career up until that point."

"I decided that being an operator was what I wanted to go back to. I enjoyed teaching and I missed playing hugely – but the operation of golf excited me, and the opportunities at Paultons Golf Centre and Bramshaw Golf Club came up."

"I started in April 2021 at Paultons and then took on the group general manager role in later that year. That was quite a nice dynamic. It has just got something about it, the charm of the New Forest."

After more than two years cutting his teeth as a general manager, Green heard about the opportunity at Basingstoke – at the time not a highly publicised opening.

"I saw the Basingstoke role advertised with CMAE," he recalled. "Not knowing much about the club I did a bit of research and thought to myself what a fabulous opportunity so applied. I was in for two or three jobs at this time and no preconceptions that any of them would become my future."

"When I received the call from Scott Patience offering the position I was so elated as to be able to come in, finish the golf club off and set it up... you don't really get many opportunities like that."

Green arrived in Basingstoke when the course's metamorphosis was already well underway. Weller Designs was commissioned to construct a new downland course, taking full advantage of the site's undulating terrain to build an exciting but challenging layout.

"Before, the club was a really pleasant parkland golf course, of which there are hundreds if not thousands in the UK."

"If there was no opportunity to sell it, I think everybody at Basingstoke would have been quite content with what they had," admits Green.

Instead, ten holes of the new-look course opened for play in June last year, and there has scarcely been a quiet tee sheet since.

"It has a stern test, yes – more than 6,800 yards off the back tees – but never in a way that hinders the players from having fun. I think there are half a dozen holes worthy of being a signature hole at most clubs."

By the time all 18 holes were in play, in mid-September, the clubhouse was also ready to welcome members.

Architects Feilden+Mawson LLP, an architectural firm with a track record of working on clubhouses at the likes of Royal West Norfolk and Royal Norwich, worked closely with Basingstoke's senior management team to devise a plan expressly for the club's specifications.

The new focal point of Basingstoke Golf Club is spacious enough to house a bar, dining area, pro shop, conference space and changing facilities for members. Sleekly designed, the building even features a veranda with panoramic views across the golf course.

Outside, a new car park was laid down to meet the anticipated surge in demand. Even a purpose-built new greenkeepers' building has opened on site in the last year.

"Our new clubhouse is absolutely magnificent," said Green. "We moved in there last September, and it really does feel like home now. The members absolutely love it and it really gives them something they didn't have before in terms of space. It is the perfect spot to unwind, and it really gives the club a communal feel."

"There's a lot more to this place than we had at the previous site. There's a bigger acreage to look after, a bigger footprint to the clubhouse, a grander greens facility, a driving range... there are so many components to this golf club that they didn't have on the old site."

"Plus, there's a lot more structure required to make sure that it operates as it should do and of course that all comes at a cost."

"The really exciting thing about the position we are in now is that the possibilities are so broad," he added. "We have a fresh start on a really fantastic course and so many avenues available for us to explore." **END**

PIN VISION

THE ITALIAN STARTUP THAT'S TAKING OVER EUROPEAN GOLF



It seems that the world of golf course management applications is flooded with a glut of options, but one Italian brand has been turning heads in recent months with a pair of high-profile partnerships.

In 2022, with the lockdown years in the rear-view mirror and the sport riding the wave of the resulting boom, Pin Vision was founded on one very simple concept: in golf, detail is everything.

Most of the app's 20,000+ users know it chiefly as a hi-tech alternative to the trusty rangefinder, but scratch the surface and you'll uncover the company's true goal: to digitise all the bells and whistles of the golf experience and let players focus on the good stuff.

Now the tech brand is not only partnered with an array of great clubs from its native Italy and abroad but has also been adopted by two of the most influential golf venues of the decade: 2024's 'World's Best Golf Course' winner the Dunas Course at Terras da Comporta in Portugal, and 2023 Ryder Cup host Marco Simone Golf & Country Club in Italy.

According to the brand's co-founder and COO, Luigi Gorla, the brand's knack for solving course management problems has been just as decisive in its rapid expansion as the GPS software: "We want Pin Vision to make golf easier for people on both sides of the equation.

"Managers, greenkeepers and caddie masters have so much choice when it comes to apps and software. We felt that there was a gap in the market for a course management app that puts all of these

functions in one place, which can take the hassle out of that choice and save clubs time and money."

That's not to say that the pin location does not remain central to the offering. To golfers, the difference between a 9-iron and a pitching wedge can determine whether they walk away with a par or a double bogey.

Thanks to GPS software, Pin Vision takes the mystery out of the club selection process. "Even on a small green, the pin position completely changes the way you play each hole. On a big green there might be two or three clubs' difference between a pin at the front or back. Golf is hard enough already, you need all the information you can get!"

When a club partners with Pin Vision, their engineers craft a cutting-edge map and load it onto the app's software. The process is completely remote and it's safe to say Pin Vision's team have developed a real expertise.

"We can generally get a course fully mapped out within a couple of days," says Gorla. "Then every time a greenkeeper moves the flag, they can easily update the app to show users exactly where their target is on that day – or they can schedule pin position changes ahead of time if that's easier."

Players can then check that distance on the map, rolling the best qualities of a rangefinder and a yardage book into one. The same applies for hazards, too – if you're not sure whether you can carry your approach shot over an impending lake or not, Pin Vision will shed some light on the situation.



“EVEN ON A SMALL GREEN, THE PIN POSITION COMPLETELY CHANGES THE WAY YOU PLAY EACH HOLE. ON A BIG GREEN THERE MIGHT BE TWO OR THREE CLUBS’ DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PIN AT THE FRONT OR BACK”

You will still need to account for factors like wind speed and elevation changes, but one could argue that golf without any thinking at all would be a pointless endeavour.

Add features like a digital scorecard and an interactive map of golf venues, and you’ve got an all-in-one course companion pre-loaded into your phone or Apple Watch.

It is as close as most of us will ever come to having a caddy in our pockets (or carts, if your club’s fleet of buggies enables Pin Vision software).

But the minutia of the sport is equally crucial to the people managing golf courses as it is to the ones playing on them. Pin Vision sees the two groups as two sides of the same coin.

When it comes to communicating with your players, letting them know the new pin positions is just the tip of the iceberg. Push notifications are a useful tool for many clubs in the modern era, and Pin Vision has built-in capacity for exactly that, saving the expense of a separate system.

You also need to consider events – entrants into your competitions need to know where and when to gather for prize giving ceremonies, after all. That’s where being able to deliver that information straight to their pockets can be a game changer.

Stats tracking is another headache for many clubs that Pin Vision may have the solution for. Managers can easily analyse not just the number of players using their course but also the age range and gender demographics.

Often useful information, of course, but it is hardly practical to have a member of staff conducting exit polls next to the 18th green.

And the team at Pin Vision are not finished yet – additions are still coming thick and fast, most recently in the form of an interactive globe that will tell you where the nearest golf course is no matter where you are. Think of it like a golf purist’s version of Google Maps and you’ve got the idea.

Any golf course manager will tell you that not all of their players will be persuaded to make the switch to technology-based scorecards and software.

A great deal of traditional range finders will stay in their owner’s golf bag for life,

and that’s where many GPS applications stumble.

But Pin Vision makes it easy to print their own pin position sheets – which, naturally, change when the greenkeeper updates the software. That way, even the staunchest of traditionalists will have the option of taking a physical course guide out with them for the round.

And when it comes to the user experience, Pin Vision claim that they have thought of everything.

Already available with dozens of clubs in its native Italy, Pin Vision took its first steps overseas at the start of 2024 with a handful of partnerships in the UK (including the Altonwood Group and Mill Hill Golf Club, and the list is growing every month).

In the year since, the brand has gone from a relatively new player in Italian golf to a partner of multiple world-renowned golf venues. Anyone who loves the sport was following the 2023 Ryder Cup at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, and nobody has earned more plaudits than David McLay Kidd’s Dunas Course at Terras da Comporta, Portugal.

Both courses can now be analysed in meticulous detail in Pin Vision’s app. If you want to recreate some of the heroic shots that secured the win for Team Europe in Italy, you’ve never had a better chance.

The addition of those two venues to an already impressive roster is, perhaps, the most sure fire sign so far that the Pin Vision revolution is here for the long run. More big-name courses are certain to follow.

“We’re very pleased with how many enquiries we get from clubs about becoming a partner, especially when one of their members requests it,” says Gorla, “but what’s maybe more important is the positive feedback we’re seeing from clubs who have already signed up.

“The next steps right now are to keep developing new features, whether they are ideas we already have in the pipeline or things that clubs suggest to us.

“At heart, our mission is to make golf easier for players and staff – and if a new feature does that, we will do our best to implement it.” **END**



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"OVER 600 BILLION SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BOTTLES ARE
USED AROUND THE WORLD ANNUALLY"



Words

Philip Russell
Chief Purpose Officer
Bluewater

GUEST BOOK

PHILIP RUSSELL

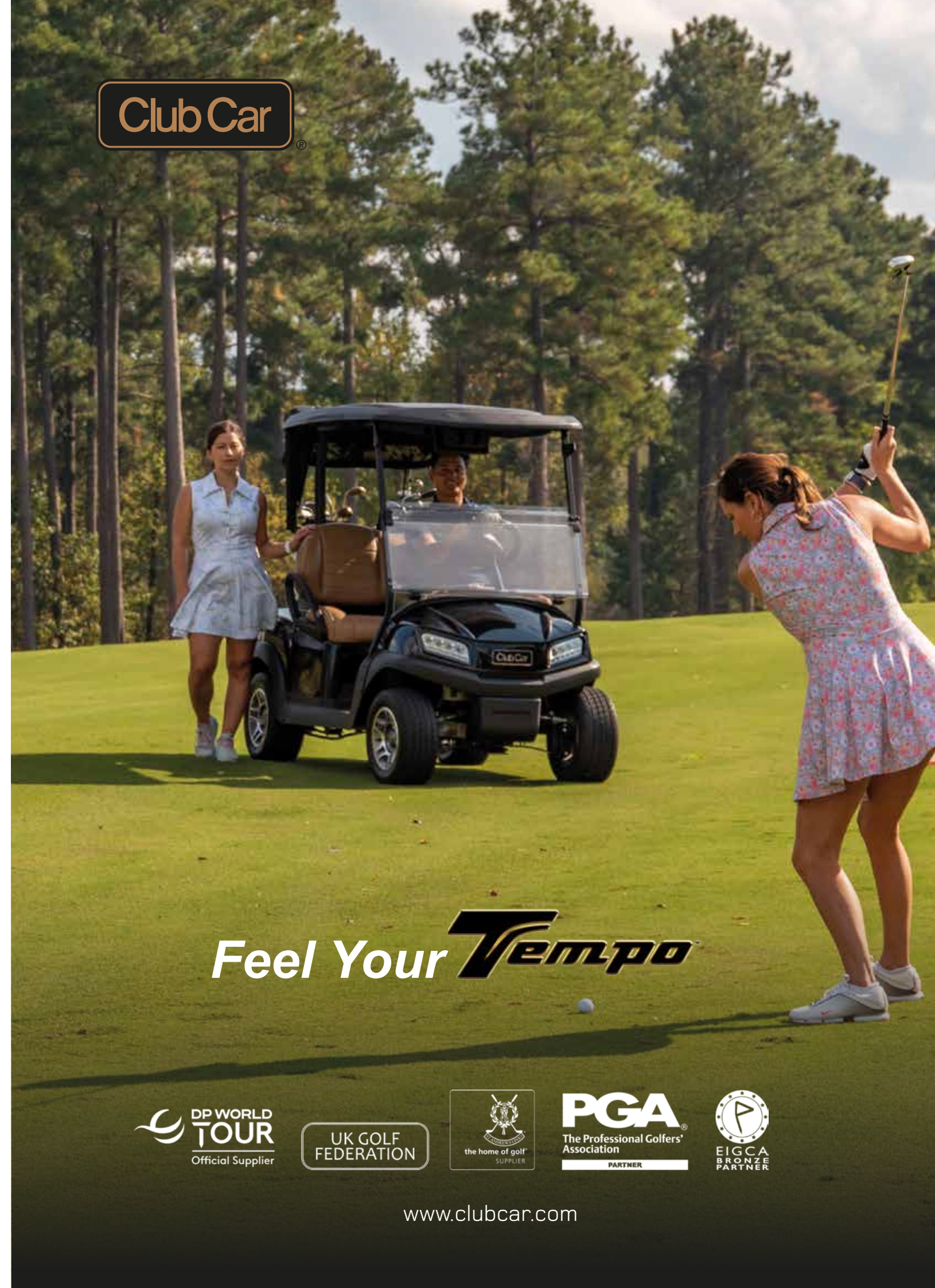


Considering the human organism cannot survive for more than a few days without water, access to hydration is often perceived as a taken-for-granted factor of our daily lives. When you're thirsty, you take a drink, and that's the end of it. What has become increasingly concerning and alarming, however, is that our relationship with water has fundamentally changed and not in a good way.

Particularly the 'convenience' – albeit obsession – that many parts of the world have developed with single-use plastic water bottles. Use them once and throw them away. The dirty secret of the bottled water industry is that over 600 billion single-use plastic bottles are used around the world annually, and plastic recycling – at best – hovers around only nine per cent. The majority is landfilled, incinerated, or ends up in the ocean.

At Bluewater, we believe enough is enough when it comes to choosing between fast and damaging 'convenience' water in plastic bottles or the gamble of drinking untreated tap water. We have innovated a new way of staying hydrated, leveraging the transformational power of purification technology that can turn nearly any local water source into pure, delicious, and planet-friendly hydration.

And our partnership with the GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf ensures that our work also helps support the future of sustainability in, and through, golf worldwide. **END**



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