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"I'VE NOTICED AN INCREASED LEVEL OF SLOW PLAY RECENTLY,
PARTICULARLY ON MAINLAND EUROPE AT WHAT ONE MIGHT
DISPARAGINGLY REFER TO AS TOURIST HOTSPOTS"

FAIR COMMENT

I suppose it should come as no surprise that, after a brief high-profile (low influence) campaign, slow play is starting to creep back into the game... slowly. And it's not just in the pro game. I've noticed an increased level of slow play recently, particularly on mainland Europe at what one might disparagingly refer to as tourist hotspots.

I play a lot in Spain these days and it seems to be an increasing issue there. I'm not averse to a relaxed round of golf, indeed there is a golf club in Mallorca where I always enjoy nine holes, then lunch, and then the back nine – and that's fine if the club is set up that way.

If it isn't, people who insist on taking five hours-plus to play 18 holes are impacting on everybody else who comes after them. There's nothing more frustrating than joining a queue at a tee box. But I am being forced to do it more and more – and, from my discussions with other golfers and GMs, I'm not alone.

Bizarrely, my fourball – two of whom were walking and carrying – was recently called out for 'fast play'. We'd had the audacity to par a few holes and walked off the green before the group in front had teed off. We were then told to stop playing so quickly, and instead take our time and enjoy the nature... five-and-a-half hours after teeing off we finished our round.

Now, I'm not xenophobic by any means, but from my own experience and anecdotal evidence from club managers and other golfers, it would appear the biggest culprits are the Scandinavians...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/summer

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publishing and communications

FEATURING

SUMMER 2023



PAUL McCANNY

PORTMARNOCK LINKS

"We're very lucky that we've got a lovely piece of land that has natural slopes and mounds, and we've probably accentuated quite a few of those to bring in the coastal experience a little bit more."

22



PAUL MUÑOZ LANGLEY

LAS BRISAS

"In the last five years, we've transferred members that were older than 70 and 80 to members that are, more or less, between 40 and 60. Almost 300 members have been tilted from one age to that age."

26



MICHAEL O'REILLY

WHISTLING STRAITS

"We are taking some strategic steps next year to address the pace of play and improve the experience for everyone. So we are selling rounds in 2024 at 13-minute intervals and we have operated for 30-plus years at 10-minute intervals."

30



MICHAEL NEWLAND

THE BERKSHIRE

"The attractions of The Berkshire were that it has two fantastic golf courses both in the top 100 in most rankings, an excellent membership and the opportunity to help further and grow that club."

34



ISAIAH MWESIGE

AFRIYEA GOLF ACADEMY

"Seeing the golf course makes them understand how important it is to protect nature. We also go out into the community to deliver education programmes, and organise plastic and waste collections."

42

"IT SIMPLIFIES PROCESSES BY BRINGING EVERYTHING TOGETHER,
REPLACING MULTIPLE SOLUTIONS LIKE EXCEL, PEN AND PAPER,
AND SEPARATE APPS"



COVER STORY

OBBI.GOLF



With 20 years of experience in the Macklin Group, employing 650 people in health-care, hospitality, and construction, CEO of Obbi Golf, Gareth Macklin, has a deep understanding of risk management, and is passionate about empowering teams and simplifying club managers' lives.

"Obbi Golf is an innovative platform that combines compliance, safety, and training into a user-friendly solution," he explains. "It saves time, money, and mitigates risk for golf clubs."

"What sets Obbi Golf apart is its comprehensive approach, covering staff onboarding, policies, training, quality checks, audits, risk assessments, accident reporting, and insurance documentation. It simplifies processes by bringing everything together, replacing multiple solutions like Excel, pen and paper, and separate apps."

Obbi Golf acts as a one-stop shop for compliance, safety, and training. Every staff member, from senior managers to junior team members, has a personalised digital passport, ensuring the right information reaches them at the right time.

For example, greenkeepers can scan a machine's QR code for previous checks, status updates, and personalised instructions. This personalised approach extends to all departments, providing necessary tools for seamless integration.

Developed with the Health and Safety Executive and leading insurers, Obbi Golf prioritises safety in golf clubs.

Traditional audits offer snapshots of compliance at specific times, burdening managers with weekly orders, multiple checks, and training updates. Obbi Golf streamlines this process with a centralised system, effortlessly meeting legal requirements.

Real-time compliance status is accessible within seconds, replacing outdated filing cabinets with digital visibility.

The manager dashboard features a colour-coded traffic light system, alerting managers to critical issues (red), upcoming expirations (amber), and compliance areas (green). It provides real-time insights into staff, training, and safety compliance.

Obbi Golf's sophisticated platform alerts team members of obligations, sending reminders and escalating notifications if necessary. This accountability ensures everyone is responsible, with a safety net in place and therefore reducing admin time by up to 76 per cent.

The platform's innovation has earned multiple awards, including recognition as one of the top fifty most innovative companies in the UK and Ireland, as well as the Best Emerging Business.

It was also hand selected for the MIT REAP program in Boston, strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems and transforming economies.

In conclusion, Obbi Golf seamlessly integrates compliance, safety, and training into a user-friendly platform, reshaping the golf club industry. **END**

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SKY SPORTS NOT BOWLING ME OVER

Since you last sat down with a glass of port and a vintage stilton to read my column, I have passed the age of 60, gracefully, albeit not exactly sober. In the UK, this entitles me to free NHS prescriptions – probably saving me around £500 per annum; a free bus pass – though our village has only one bus per day and I'm not exactly sure where it ends up; and discounted rail tickets – which means I don't lose as much money when the trains are on strike.

Additionally, some museums offer concession prices for over-60s for general entry, which has surprised me given most of the museums I've visited in the past few years have been free. There are also myriad discounts available for 'seniors' at local eateries, hairdressers, High St shops and sports clubs. Though some kick in at 60, others insist you need to be older – by which time a discount at a barber is not something that's going to save you much money.

However, the one thing I can't claim is a discount on Sky Sports channels... and I think they've missed a trick, there. I can only speak for myself, but when I retire, as I'm not a gardener, hiker, committee member, or (intend to be) a village busy-body, I could do with watching a bit of golf on the old telly-box. I was also perturbed to discover there isn't a 24-hour rolling lawn bowls channel. When I was on holiday in the US recently, there appeared to be an entire industry built up around the televising of 10-pin bowling, which, at the top level, must be as exciting as watching somebody park a car, but without the element of jeopardy.

Once a bowler gets to the level that sees every delivery screened for millions to watch, it's not about how many pins they knock down – it's about the odd occasion they leave one standing. I wasn't one of those left standing, however, as I fell asleep around the 10-minute mark. Lawn green bowls may be more sedate but there's more variety per end, and a better-than-average chance of seeing a defibrillator in use. And, on that topic, my congratulations go to Royal Dornoch for becoming, apparently, the first golf club to install a defibrillator on all buggies.

Anyway, I digress. A Sky Sports discount for seniors would encourage more of us to take out a subscription as it's easier to persuade the other half, because there would be no need for them to continue working into their 80s to afford the current prices. Thursday through Sunday, of course, we can watch the pro tours, but I'm not sure what Sky Sports Golf shows at the other times. They could do worse than show some classic golfing encounters – and, by 'classic' I mean anything to which they have the current rights: A Round with Alliss, perhaps. Always a good watch that, though, like the BBC's Top of the Pops repeats, I imagine some would need to be omitted now on the grounds of decency. I can't recall if Rolf Harris et al featured on that programme or not, but losing one's memory is a guaranteed issue when getting old.

Anyway, I've just turned 60. I'd really like to have a discount on my Sky Sports package, but sadly that doesn't seem to be available. I can, however, have free NHS prescriptions... **END**



NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



SEVENTY2 GOLF APPOINTED BY DESERT GATE DMC TO ACCELERATE GROWTH

Seventy2 Golf has been appointed as the Global Sales Agency for Desert Gate, the premier Destination Management Company in the Middle East & Indian Ocean. Desert Gate has been providing award-winning destination management services for its growing portfolio of tour operator clients for close to 20 years. With the newest additions of Qatar and Mauritius to their featured destinations, Desert Gate has firmly established itself as one of the market leading premium DMC's, with clear ambitions of future progression. Desert Gate's extensive knowledge within multiple destinations stems from the teams 75 years combined industry experience.

SEARCH 'DESERT GATE' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



PLAYMOREGOLF ANNOUNCES RECORD-BREAKING SURGE IN MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

PlayMoreGolf, the UK's largest points-based golf membership offering, is celebrating after posting a set of record-breaking sales figures which "signal a significant shift in golfers' habits." The number of PlayMoreGolf's new member sales in March soared to a total value of £1.25million — 48 per cent higher than the company's previous best-ever monthly sales figures. The announcement by PlayMoreGolf comes in the wake of a recent survey of UK golf club managers which revealed that membership resignations had risen amid the key annual April subscription renewals.

SEARCH 'PLAYMOREGOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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CARNOUSTIE GOLF LINKS PLANTS 1000TH TREE TO ENHANCE NATURE ON COURSE

On Thursday May 25, 2023, Pat Sawers (Lord Lieutenant of Angus), Brian Boyd, Provost of Angus and Councillor David Cheape planted the 1000th sapling into the ground on The Carnoustie Buddon Course. In attendance was Michael Wells (chief executive of Carnoustie Golf Links), Craig Boath (head of sustainability at Carnoustie Golf Links), Simon Inger and Steven Reid (Seagreen) and local children from Carlogie and Burnside schools.

SEARCH 'CARNOUSTIE' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



WOMEN GOLFERS VALUE ELECTRIC TROLLEYS AHEAD OF NEW SETS OF CLUBS

The majority of women golfers in the UK and Ireland who use a trolley as their preferred method of getting around the course, put the value of the load-bearing transport method on a par with or even ahead of investing in a new set of clubs. According to independent research commissioned by trolley brand Motocaddy, over two-thirds of lady golfers (69 per cent) rate the convenient powered trolley as either a similar investment to new sticks or an even better one for raising their game, of whom more than one in five (21 per cent) deem a trolley as the better purchase.

SEARCH 'MOTOCADDY' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ARGENTARIO GOLF & WELLNESS RESORT JOINS THE MARRIOTT GROUP

Recognised as one of the top Tuscan golfing destinations, the Argentario Golf & Wellness Resort has joined Marriott International, the largest hospitality group in the world. The Resort, which boasts the only course in the country with PGA National Italy status, thus becomes the first five-star resort in Italy and one of the few golf properties in Europe to belong to Marriott's golf portfolio. Argentario is now also a member of the loyalty programme, Marriott Bonvoy, which allows travellers to collect points and transform them into benefits, free stays and much, much more.

SEARCH 'ARGENTARIO' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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PAUL LARSEN JOINS ECOBUNKER AS A TECHNICAL CONSULTANT

EcoBunker has announced the appointment of Paul Larsen as a technical consultant. Larsen's varied and interesting career started as a groundsman in the East End of London before leaving to become a postman with the Royal Mail. After working his way around the world, Larsen found his true calling in golf course maintenance and management. A member of the Kent County golf team, Larsen already had a deep grounding in the game and its strategy, he added the key educational and practical skills enabling him to progress rapidly to senior positions.

SEARCH 'ECOBUNKER' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



DEFIBRILLATORS ADDED TO STAR BUGGIES AT ROYAL DORNOCH

Royal Dornoch Golf Club is thought to be the first golf club in the world to fit defibrillators to all its buggies. The buggies chosen to carry this potentially life-saving device are STAR EV's Capellas from Reesink Scotland. Royal Dornoch in Scotland already had defibrillators in the clubhouse and halfway house, but this concept goes one step further to ensure they can be accessed while out on the course and provide treatment more quickly.

SEARCH 'ROYAL DORNOCH' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GOLFSIXES INTRODUCING MORE YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHORTER FORM OF TEAM GOLF

The popular GolfSixes format is continuing to expand and introduce even more young people to a shorter format of the sport following a successful pilot season in continental Europe. Young people from 75 golf clubs participated in the 25 GolfSixes Leagues during the 2022 pilot season in Belgium, Germany, Holland, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the initiative is being developed further so that young people in Czech Republic, Finland, Malta and Slovakia can also participate in 2023. In addition, a pilot of the GolfSixes Mini League will also take place in these participating countries.

SEARCH 'GOLFSIXES GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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

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



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

Karl-Martin Härström
CEO / Club Manager
Kalmar Golf Club

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HEATHLAND COURSE AT IPSWICH GOLF CLUB ON TOP FORM WITH ISEKI

Working hard to restore this beautiful heathland course back to its former glory, Ipswich Golf Club with its 9-hole and 18-hole courses just keeps getting better every year. The driving force behind all this is Graham Brumpton, course manager who has dedicated his last 33 years to developing the course, gradually introducing heathland elements back and managing the woodland areas to allow the natural habitats to thrive. With numerous industry awards for best environmental golf course and conservation greenkeeper, wildlife and environmental concerns are a high priority for the club.

SEARCH 'ISEKI' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GOLFSTAR GROUP APPOINTS ANDY GORDON AS SENIOR BUSINESS DEVELOPER

GolfStar Group has announced the appointment of golf industry expert Andy Gordon as a senior business developer. Gordon will bring his vast industry knowledge within the world of golf to develop and drive participation on GolfStar's multiple ranges in Sweden, he will also be working with GolfStar's future expansion on the Iberian Peninsula. A golf professional of over 25 years, Gordon's journey has taken him around the world in the search for personal improvement within coaching, facility and business management.

SEARCH 'GOLFSTAR' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



DONALD TRUMP HERALDS START OF NEW GOLF VENTURE IN SCOTLAND

Donald J Trump, 45th President of the United States, yesterday gave the green light for a new golf venture in Scotland that will create "one of the great golf courses of the world." President Trump announced that work on his new MacLeod course — dedicated to his mother, Mary Anne MacLeod — was now beginning, and broke ground on the new course at Trump International Scotland in Aberdeenshire after cutting a ceremonial red ribbon to mark the occasion.

SEARCH 'TRUMP INTERNATIONAL' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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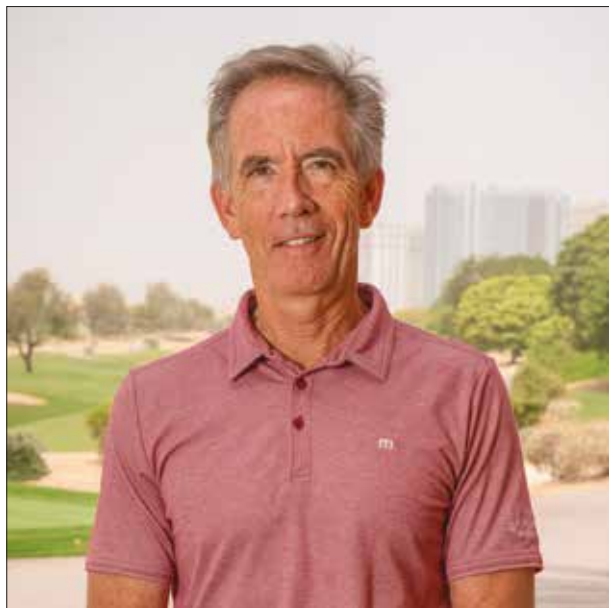
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TROON INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCE MARK CHAPLESKI TO RETIRE IN JULY

Troon executive vice president Mark Chapleski will retire at the end of July, following 24 years with the golf and club management leader. Chapleski has led the Troon International division since 2017, growing the company's international portfolio to 40-plus facilities in 20 countries. "In leading our international efforts, Mark has certainly left his fingerprints across the globe, growing the sport and the locations where golf can be enjoyed," said Bruce Glasco, Troon's CEO. "Mark's passion for the game is surpassed only by his compassion for people and those providing first-class service to our many members and guests."

SEARCH 'MARK CHAPLESKI' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ISEKI PROVES HARD TO BEAT AT SOUTH BEDS GOLF CLUB

Tom Hooper, course manager at South Beds Golf Club in Luton, claims that his new ISEKI tractor is one of the best he has seen throughout his long and illustrious career. Hooper has been working at the club since 1996 and was appointed course manager in 2003. Throughout his tenure he has overseen many course improvements and has seen many technological advancements in terms of equipment. A wide range of equipment has come and gone at South Beds, but there hasn't been many that has lived up to one of his newest purchases.

SEARCH 'ISEKI' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



HMH GOLF & LEISURE TO MARKET FOUR AMERICAN GOLF LEISURE BUSINESSES

Following a thorough strategic review of all its operations, International Leisure Group has made the decision to sell a number of its leisure businesses to enable continued focus on the core retail offering at American Golf. The company has instructed HMH Golf & Leisure to offer the sites for sale. The four properties, two of which are located within the M25 and two in the Manchester area, are Barnehurst Golf Club and Golf Kingdom Chadwell Heath both in London, and High Legh Park Golf Club, Knutsford, Cheshire and Golf Kingdom in Rossendale.

SEARCH 'HMH GOLF' ONLINE

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La Hacienda Golf offers its members the opportunity to enjoy two of the best golf courses in the area, Links and Heathland, and a wide range of exclusive services as well as a wide gastronomic offer, which turns La Hacienda into a First Level Club.

The Links Course has been entirely redesigned by the prestigious American designer Kurtis Bowman, and offers players a unique golf experience.

With totally new holes, tees, greens and bunkers, a spectacular course has been achieved both for its infrastructure, game possibilities, as well as for its impressive views of the Mediterranean Sea, Gibraltar and North Africa.

Located on a hillside, The Heathland Course was designed by renowned former Ryder Cup player, Dave Thomas, and offers a variety of natural landscapes with wide fairways and exceptional views of the Mediterranean Sea and the Andalusian hills.

Michael Lenihan, CEO of worldclass.golf said: "I visited The Links during construction prior to opening, and it was evident even then that the course was going to be something quite special. Having returned to play the course in April, it really didn't disappoint, and is worthy of inclusion within the portfolio for 2023." **END**



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PAUL McCANNY

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, PORTMARNOCK LINKS



When you first meet Paul McCanny, it's evident that he is passionate about everything and anything to do with golf.

Born and raised in Ireland, McCanny, 38, has spent his entire career up until fairly recently working as a golf professional, and admits that from a very early age, had a keen interest in watching golfers on the range and leaning from them in his hometown of Derry, north of the border.

So, when the opportunity arose to join Blackbush Golf Club in County Meath, south of the border, as an assistant pro in August 2005, McCanny jumped at the chance.

"I enjoyed golf from an early age," said McCanny, "and went in as an assistant pro at Blackbush and at the same time started my PGA in Birmingham at The Belfry.

"Traditionally, going back to that time, the role of a PGA golf professional was in the shop, teaching and a bit of playing whereas now, obviously, there are lots of different areas and a lot of guys and girls have gone into management roles."

Keen to progress his career, McCanny moved the relatively short distance to Killeen Castle in April 2011, a few months prior to the resort hosting the Solheim Cup, commenting: "It was a great experience. I think that was probably one of the first Solheim's that really exploded in terms of numbers.

"Every Solheim Cup since has been better and better and the Ladies game at the moment is booming and the standard is phenomenal."

McCanny spent ten years at Killeen Castle, progressing to head golf professional

although he is the first to admit, that the job title perhaps didn't fully do his role justice.

"The head pro role at Killeen Castle was very operational based. I mean I was coaching as well, as the Pelz Academy was there at that stage. They were doing a lot of short game coaching and I was doing some of the long game coaching.

"But it was very much all encompassing. I was involved in the senior management team there, and there was a small group of us who ran the golf course too. I really enjoyed that. I liked the mix, to be honest."

McCanny admits that he wouldn't feel comfortable doing one thing all of the time, so when a vacancy opened up at Portmarnock Links for a director of golf, he didn't find the transition into his first official management role as daunting as perhaps it could have been.

When Conor Russell decided to move roles from Portmarnock Links to The K Club in March 2021, McCanny rang his friend to congratulate him on the move, only to be asked by Russell if he'd have any interest in filling his shoes.

Initially, McCanny politely declined the offer as he was content in his role at Killeen Castle, yet the lure of working at Portmarnock Links eventually proved too great, and a few weeks later, McCanny succumbed to temptation, and accepted the role of director of golf.

But with a teaching background, including coaching juniors with Golf Ireland since 2017 – a role he still fulfils – how does he split his time, and his managerial role at Portmarnock Links?





"NOW, YOU CAN SEE THE SEA A LOT, YOU CAN HEAR THE SEA A LOT. I THINK THAT'S A NICE ADDITION WHEN YOU'RE COMING TO PLAY LINKS GOLF, PARTICULARLY ALONG THIS COASTLINE"

"It works really well because I do like being involved in coaching, and I don't have a huge amount of time allocated to it because it's with Golf Ireland," he explains. "I work with the juniors at performance development level, so, they're invested in improving."

"It's on my own time," explains McCanny. "Sometimes we've come here, and they've played the course but because courses are now so busy, it's actually quite hard to get locations to bring kids out and let them play."

"The coaching is generally in the winter months, so when things are a little bit quieter here, it doesn't really impact my role. Going into the busy season for golf, the coaching reduces down. So, yeah. It works quite well."

But as keen and as devoted as McCanny is to both Golf Ireland and Portmarnock Links, even he may have struggled this past winter to juggle everything, given the significant investment and renovation work undertaken to the Links Course.

Steeped in history, Portmarnock Links was the former estate of the Jameson family – world-famous for Irish Whiskey – with their former family home now a hotel which provides a majestic backdrop to the course.

In 1858, the Jameson family developed a private 12-hole golf course that stretched as far as the infamous 15th hole at neighbouring Portmarnock Golf Club, and it was in the grounds of the old Jameson estate that IMG in conjunction with European Golf Design and Bernhard Langer crafted Portmarnock Links which opened for play in 1995.

The hotel and golf course have had numerous owners since then and following the acquisition in 2019 by Northland Real Estate – a Canadian-owned family business – the future for the resort looks to be far more secure.

And under the stewardship of long-standing course superintendent, Fintan Brennan, McCanny and Brennan worked together with Jeff Lynch from ReGolf Design and DAR Golf Construction to create six new greens and three new tee complexes all within the space of just four months.

"The thinking [behind the redesign], to be honest, was that there were a number of holes where the feedback was very mixed on them," explained McCanny. "It was a difficult one to try and figure out, but people

either loved them or hated them. I think that really came down to the playability and the fairness of them, and one of the things that we wanted to improve was the routing as there were quite a few crossover areas, and you were walking past greens as people were putting and things like that. So, we wanted to try and take that away.

"But we wanted to try and use the attributes we have in the dunes. So, we're very lucky that we've got a lovely piece of land that has natural slopes and mounds, and we've probably accentuated quite a few of those to bring in the coastal experience a little bit more."

"Now, you can see the sea a lot, you can hear the sea a lot. I think that's a nice addition when you're coming to play Links Golf, particularly along this coastline. Although you can see the sea in a number of the courses, you don't really feel that close to it. Whereas here you definitely get that."

"We also have a new irrigation system, and we've taken away any AstroTurf areas that we had previously. Everything is now natural grass, and all the pathways are natural grass."

"Fintan and all of us have a focus on the environmental side of things as well. So, we're going to seriously reduce our water inputs, pesticides and find new ways of doing things."

With Portmarnock Links located just 15 minutes from Dublin airport, the hotel has become a bit of a hub for overseas golfers – American's in particular – to stay and play whilst using the hotel as a base to play some of the 'trophy' courses in the area such as neighbouring Portmarnock.

Yet, as Dublin's only coastal golf resort McCanny is more than happy to see this trend continue.

"Obviously, we're very much focused on Dublin and the east coast, but what we see a lot of the time is when people land in Dublin airport, they'll stay here maybe one night or on the last couple of nights of their trip, and they'll head off to the northwest or the southwest and get a mix of everything."

"The American's love Links Golf," concluded McCanny, and with the on-course improvements at Portmarnock Links, visitors have even more reason to love it now. **END**





PAUL MUÑOZ LANGLEY

DIRECTOR GENERAL, LAS BRISAS



'A Day In The Life' of Paul Muñoz Langley, the director general of Real Club de Golf Las Brisas in Marbella, Spain can often see the 45-year-old Spaniard, 'Here, There And Everywhere'.

And 'I've Got A Feeling' that when asked about his 26-tenure at Las Brisas, Muñoz may well say that it's been a 'Long And Winding Road' down on the Costa del Sol.

For music aficionados among you, especially those partial to The Beatles and Paul McCartney, no doubt you will have noticed the somewhat tenuous link to four well-known songs thus far.

And there is good reason for this, as Muñoz, who was born of an English mother, hence Langley, said: "My name, Paul, comes from my father who's Spanish, but he loved The Beatles, so he was very keen that I was named after Paul McCartney.

"It seems funny, but it is what it is," he laughs.

And another Beatles track, 'I Wanna Be Your Man' could be quite apt for Muñoz and Las Brisas, given the fact that since 1997, he has progressed through the ranks from starter to director general in a quite remarkable rise.

"I started at the club here in October 1997," says Muñoz, "just after the Ryder Cup at Valderrama. Since then, I've been doing almost everything in the club."

Working his way through the ranks, in 2008, Muñoz – in conjunction with Las Brisas – decided to move into the sphere of club management, with the club subsidising a degree in Golf Course Management at a private university in Malaga.

Clearly ambitious to move into the higher echelons of the club, Muñoz said: "I thought I had the sufficient background to become a GM elsewhere, and it was the club that subsidised my education.

"But they thought it was better than paying me for going to another club. They just thought it was great that I became GM."

Always a keen golfer, Muñoz whose handicap is currently 21, says that he always wanted to work within the golf industry, especially as his father worked in the industry previously.

"He worked in an administration area, so I knew a lot about golf through him, so I thought it was a very good career option for me."

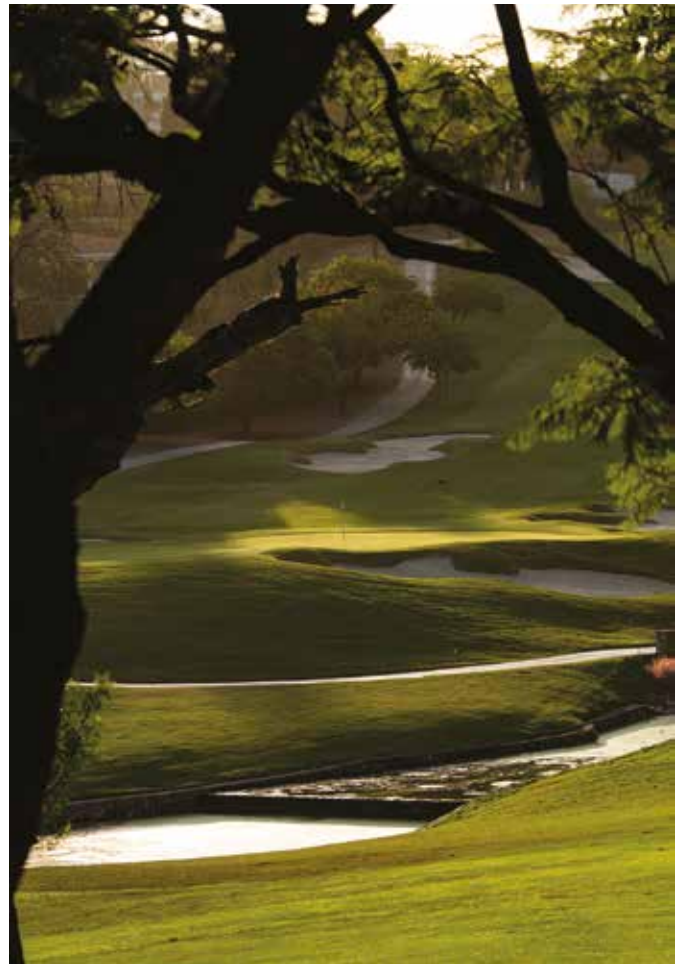
Throughout the 26 years that Muñoz has spent at Las Brisas, he's witnessed a fair few changes, but one thing that has always remained constant, is the club's prestige and exclusivity.

"It's a €25.000 fee to join, and you have to acquire a share, which makes you a shareholder of the company, and an owner of the assets," he explains.

"A share, in the private market is worth more or less €30.000, and you then pay an entry fee of €25.000 and then an annual fee of €3.000"

So, anyone looking to join, will need an initial investment of circa €60.000 which may sound a lot, yet for the ultra-wealthy Marbella area, could be deemed inexpensive, especially with the membership demographic shifting in recent years.

"We used to have 45 per cent British and now it's tilted to 45 per cent from the Nordic



"IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, WE'VE TRANSFERRED MEMBERS THAT WERE OLDER THAN 70 AND 80 TO MEMBERS THAT ARE, MORE OR LESS, BETWEEN 40 AND 60"

countries – Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland – with the UK now 25 per cent."

Aside from the change in nationalities frequenting the club, the age range is evolving too as he explains: "It's been more drastic in the last five.

"It's two things; maybe it's age profile, pandemic, it's a mixture of also management. We've driven and pushed the membership to get it younger.

"They play better golf ever since we refurbished the course and made it longer. Kyle Phillips helped us to do this refurbishment and update the routing of the course. It's probably a mixture of many things.

"In the last five years, we've transferred members that were older than 70 and 80 to members that are, more or less, between 40 and 60. Almost 300 members have been tilted from one age to that age.

"So, in a way, the average handicap is also lower, but we also have many more rounds of golf played per year. We've come from 20,000 to 35,000 rounds of golf in the last five years.

"Our members are wealthier too," admits Muñoz, who states that the club currently has 1,200 numbered in their ranks.

Although always one of the most prestigious clubs on the Costa del Sol, Las Brisas hasn't always been one of the best courses. Originally designed by Robert Trent Jones in 1968, Kyle Phillips was appointed in 2012 to renovate the course.

"We spoke to a number of architects, but Kyle Phillips seemed to have the same philosophy as Robert Trent Jones," he says.

"He had also refurbished the only Robert Trent Jones-named club in the US, so we thought he was the person most closely linked to that approach.

"He was very subtle on the front nine, basically updating bunker positioning and an increase in the length and putting back greens as they were originally. But he was far more aggressive on the back nine.

"He actually changed routing of holes 14, 15, 16, and 17 are almost new holes, especially 16, which has a new path that didn't exist before.

"We've tried to bring back Las Brisas to where it should be, [and] trying to become the best membership private club in the area."

But as Muñoz admits, almost doubling the number of rounds annually has created its own problems, especially with nine-minute flight times.

"Now we've struggled to have availability on the course. What we struggle is with the months of the year where we have less light, because we tend to struggle to fit 150 members on the course when it's, for example, late October, when you have less light, or November, but it's a steady 150 members per day on the course."

But with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity, is Las Brisas reaching a tipping point in the number of annual rounds?

"Yes," admits Muñoz candidly. "We're there already. We're starting to struggle where we like to have certain service towards the members. Either we increase the number of staff, or we try to decrease the number of rounds, so we are able to offer the best services to all of them.

"We would love to increase our flight times to every ten minutes, but if we do go back to ten minutes [from nine] we will struggle."

And as Muñoz confirms, with more Nordic golfers on the course, the pace-of-play can often become an issue.

"They're slower and tend to have more difficulties to accept the rules and regulations of golf standards in general, whereas the British know how to behave on the course.

"Nordic people have a kind of more relaxed view on rules and push us to, say, to be more flexible.

"We have two marshals every day on the course, and even though we give a lot of tools to them to be able to explain to members if they're slow, we have to be very careful on how to advise members to play quicker or to repair divots or to repair pitch marks.

"But I mean, we try to do our best and I think members are happy in that sense."

And when asked about any longing to move to a different club and experience life away from Las Brisas, Muñoz has no real desire to leave.

"Not really. I mean, I had options, but I'm so happy here. I mean, it's like my family, my house. I've been brought up here, and I feel like I would retire from here," he says.

Perhaps 'When I'm Sixty Four' might be an apt age to 'Let it Be'. **END**

MIKE O'REILLY

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, WHISTLING STRAITS



As Team USA dished out the mother of all Ryder Cup beatings to the Europeans the last time the two teams met, it marked a symbolic moment for the host venue.

After the famous episodes of the War on the Shore at Kiawah Island in 1991 and the Miracle at Medinah in 2012, the most recent US-hosted Ryder Cup saw Padraig Harrington's side sink without trace in the adjacent Lake Michigan. The 19-9 result was the heaviest defeat inflicted on the European team since it evolved into the cream of the continent in 1979.

It's hard to argue it was anything other than a richly-deserved success for the Americans but the drama of any Ryder Cup is impossible without its stage, and it's difficult to believe that Whistling Straits – a name now so firmly established in golfing folklore – came to life as recently as 1998.

The Ryder Cup of 2021 was the latest in a glittering collection of high-profile tournaments, following on from three editions of the US PGA Championship (2004, 2010 and 2015) and one men's US Senior Open (2007).

But when you've already achieved just about every available ambition in a little over two decades, what exactly comes next?

Mike O'Reilly is the director of golf at Kohler Golf, which owns both Whistling Straits and Blackwolf Run (which is about ten miles down the road). The group also happens to own a certain hotel overlooking a rather famous 17th hole in Scotland.

While he acknowledges those remarkable achievements in a quarter of a century, it doesn't stop there.

O'Reilly – a born and bred American but with fairly obvious Irish heritage – reflects on the Ryder Cup with great pride and views it as a perfect sign-off on the first volume of the Kohler story.

He said: "It's the end of chapter one of Kohler Golf. We've accomplished a ton in a short time but in my mind, we are now starting chapter two of Kohler Golf.

"Hosting the Ryder Cup was amazing – but now what can we do?

"We've hosted some huge events and we continue to strengthen our relationships with the USGA and PGA of America and explore opportunities for hosting more major championships for men, women and amateurs.

"Now it's about maintaining who we are as gracious host and owner of world class championship venues and how we want to build on that foundation. It's also about being good partners and leaders among our community members.

"We have a history of hosting majors and providing an exciting golf experiences for players at the highest level, volunteers, and spectators. Of course, we would love to host the Ryder Cup again – it was incredible.

"It's a memorable thing and people will talk about it forever. And if you've hosted the Ryder Cup, I don't think that prestige ever really goes away. We had a huge surge last year and the booking window exploded. We were taking bookings 12-18 months out.

"But if we were to host it again, I may well not be here as we would probably be looking in the 2040s."

O'Reilly, 45, thinks he could be contemplating retirement if and when the Ryder







"WE ARE INTENTIONALLY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PLAYERS – ROUGHLY 15-20 PER CENT OF OUR AVAILABILITY BECAUSE WE WANT TO FOCUS ON THE QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE"

Cup should ever roll back into town but if he's still around, it could be the perfect way to bow out after half a century of service.

Blackwolf Run opened in 1988 with O'Reilly starting as a caddy in 1996 before he moved up the ranks from assistant professional to become head professional in 2007.

It's been a meteoric rise and also a seismic shift in working practices from lugging a bag around for golfers to overseeing a huge operation at a supreme golf resort which faces the fluid dynamics of seasonal weather. There are two courses at Whistling Straits (Straits and Irish), two at Blackwolf Run (River and Meadow Valleys) and an additional par-three course (The Baths).

He said: "My role is less about what's happening today and more about strategic planning for the future and there are a lot of moving parts. Staff numbers can get up to about 600 across the whole operation. We ramp up from 50-60 full-time, year-round staff up to 500-600 in the peak season from May to October."

With the nature of the role, you might expect a ruthless streak but if it's there, it's well-hidden as O'Reilly prefers a calm and measured approach, which he aims to pass on to the guests and members playing those wonderful golf courses.

He said: "Culture is king. It is important to me and felt across the organisation because it drives a lot of what we do and how people behave. Yes, we sell golf rounds, we sell shirts and food but we really make people feel a certain way and that's what they remember.

"One thing I feel I've learnt is that you balance on the knife-edge of engagement and accountability. If everyone is happy, having a great time coming to work, but they are not accountable, then stuff will start going a little wonky.

"Whereas if you are only focused on accountability, nobody will really enjoy what they're doing and they will be getting yelled at or told they're something doing wrong all the time. It would create a culture of fear where everyone is afraid to make any kind of decision.

"So I try to find the balance. I'd say I'm naturally more on the engagement side and early on as a leader, it was hard for me to have those accountability discussions and make difficult decisions with personnel.

"But I've had to train myself to hold people a little more accountable. I would say I am pretty even-keeled and I don't get too worked up – except maybe with my kids at home!"

O'Reilly is also prepared to admit he finds himself in a lucky position where the pressure to ramp up profits is secondary to creating the overall experience envisaged by the late company executive chairman, Herb Kohler, who was the driving force behind the creation of Blackwolf Run and Whistling Straits.

Before his death at the age of 83 last year, Kohler had transformed a family plumbing business into a multibillion-dollar global enterprise and then turned a tiny company town into one of the USA's top golf destinations in the village of Kohler and neighbouring Haven, where Whistling Straits is located.

O'Reilly said: "If we do what we are supposed to do and we do it well – the financial side will take care of itself. If we are cutting corners, that will be noticeable and that does more harm for us than saving a few dollars on our profit and loss statement.

"With that in mind, we are taking some strategic steps next year to address the pace of play and improve the experience for everyone. So we are selling rounds in 2024 at 13-minute intervals and we have operated for 30-plus years at 10-minute intervals.

"We are intentionally reducing the number of players – roughly 15-20 per cent of our availability because we want to focus on the quality of the experience, rather than the economics.

"People are stopping for photos, enjoying themselves and it's an expensive round of golf, so people do not want to feel like the experience is rushed."

The underlying philosophy is clearly that 'money isn't everything' – and that certainly applies to any Saudi-backed golf tours which may be interested in taking their events to this glorious stretch of Wisconsin anytime soon.

O'Reilly said: "Maybe LIV Golf evolves over time, but for now we keep exploring possibilities for hosting established major championship golf events at the highest levels. We will also continue to provide unforgettable experiences for our guests every day across all of our Kohler resort properties." **END**



Words Christopher Stratford

Online theberkshire.co.uk

MICHAEL NEWLAND

SECRETARY, THE BERKSHIRE



Someone whose only involvement in golf club management has been in top positions at Sunningdale, Royal Porthcawl and The Berkshire is not unlike a professional footballer whose only clubs have been in the upper level of the Premier League.

Such is the case with Michael Newland, secretary at the latter, who began as reservations and events manager at Sunningdale before becoming their deputy secretary and later secretary at Royal Porthcawl.

Asked to reflect on having only worked at such stellar clubs, Newland's natural instinct is to deflect praise with the suggestion it has been down to "right place, right time. I think I was just lucky."

This may contain a small grain of truth, but when the now 51-year-old first decided to attempt to move into golf club management back in 2008 he had already accrued a wealth of marketing experience in the sports industry, first working for the Lawn Tennis Association then Mizuno, adidas and TaylorMade.

While on a GCMA course in Weston-super-Mare, he was advised to write to Wentworth, The Berkshire and Sunningdale – all clubs close to where he lived – to ask if he could shadow staff as he attempted to crystallise his intent to pursue a career in this sphere.

"John Hunt was the secretary of The Berkshire at the time and said unfortunately he couldn't help as they were undergoing a big clubhouse project. Sunningdale said come in for a chat, and I haven't looked back from there really," explains Newland. "Sunningdale had a position going, first of all as

reservations and events manager, and I was interviewed and was lucky enough to get the job, and then moved very quickly to deputy secretary at Sunningdale.

"It was all right place, right time. I think I was just lucky. I had four great years at Sunningdale and then the opportunity came up at Royal Porthcawl and, being a South Wales boy, Royal Porthcawl is easily the number one club in Wales and that opportunity was too good not to apply. I was lucky enough to get that."

Hailing from Cardiff, he learned to play golf as a junior at Radyr Golf Club, but explains: "Golf wasn't really my first sport. I played rugby and tennis. Coming from South Wales, rugby is huge and I played a lot of rugby and a lot of tennis, both to a reasonable standard."

"My first lesson with the pro at Radyr was to decide whether I was going to play right-or left-handed because I could play either side. I'm left-handed, playing right-handed clubs. The pro pushed me to play right-handed just because there was a better selection of clubs."

Newland has to be nudged to reveal that the "reasonable standard" mentioned saw him represent rugby-crazy Cardiff through all age groups while at the same time "knocking on" national squad recognition at tennis. A broken arm sustained while playing curtailed his rugby career and he began to play more golf alongside tennis.

Nowadays his role is as a touchline supporter – and chauffeur, of course – to sons Morgan, 12, and Dylan, 10, be it at football, rugby, swimming or golf.



"I'M VERY LUCKY, I'VE WORKED AT THREE VERY GOOD CLUBS WHERE STANDARDS ARE HIGH, BOTH ON THE COURSE AND WITHIN THE CLUBHOUSE, AND THE MEMBERSHIPS EXPECT THAT"

He lives on site at The Berkshire and says it was one of the key factors in helping him make the big decision to leave Royal Porthcawl, where he had helped in the successful staging of Senior Opens in 2014 and 2017, the Amateur Championship and the Wales Senior Open.

"I have to work one weekend day a week and I generally work a Saturday and have Sunday-Monday off," he says, "but when I'm working I can just nip home, have a cup of tea and see the boys, see my wife Amber and then get back to work, and if I'm working of an evening – many events go on late – I can still nip home and nip back, and that's a big, big plus.

"I was very settled at Porthcawl, but I think from my time at Sunningdale there were two clubs if I was ever going to move back to this area, if the jobs ever became available, it was Sunningdale or The Berkshire.

"The attractions of The Berkshire were that it has two fantastic golf courses both in the top 100 in most rankings, an excellent membership and the opportunity to help further and grow that club. The opportunity was too good not to have a go, but it was a big move because it involved moving the family."

Newland, who graduated from the University of Manchester with a degree in Leisure & Recreation with Business Management in 1994, passed the Certified Club Manager exam in 2018 and sits on the board of the Club Management Association of Europe, overseeing their finances as treasurer.

He sees it as essential that golf clubs present themselves as welcoming, friendly and helpful as possible to both members and visitors alike as they vie for attention in a crowded sporting environment.

"We've been very encouraging of visitors at all three clubs I've been at," he reflects. "It's quite interesting that you hear a little bit of surprise once a visitor's been and they say, 'Oh, it was really good [the welcome] at Porthcawl, or The Berkshire or Sunningdale, I didn't expect that.'"

"You ask them what they did expect and they'll say, 'Well, I thought it was going to be

quite snooty, and people would look down on us and it's been quite the opposite," he admitted.

"People are asking us if we enjoyed the round, if we enjoyed the course, if we enjoyed the food, have you had a nice day?"

"Ultimately, we are in the entertainment business. They come to the golf club for a good time.

"They come to meet their friends, play golf with their friends, play a nice course, have something nice to eat and we want people going away with that really happy, warm glow and you know they're going to come back again. We really are in that sort of business.

"This July I will have been here five years. I'm very lucky, I've worked at three very good clubs where standards are high, both on the course and within the clubhouse, and the memberships expect that, but they also encourage it from the staff.

"That's really important for me because I try to work to very high standards myself," he said.

Newland is popular among the membership as evidenced by regular invitations to participate in their roll-ups on a Wednesday, Saturday or a Sunday – with no ulterior motive such as being able to bend his ear over club matters.

"The people who run the roll-ups try to keep me away from committee members, so I can switch off a bit," laughs the 10-handicapper. "There's always going to be questions, 'What's happening with this, what's happening with that?', and you can answer it and they let you get on with it.

"I played golf comfortably to a mid-teens handicap when I started, but I didn't play much as a junior because I was playing so much rugby and tennis.

I've never had a full, good go at it. I think once you get into club management, you're just so busy with the day-to-day role of the job that it's almost a busman's holiday to be playing golf.

"Plus with a relatively young family, when I'm not working I try to spend the time with them." **END**

LA HACIENDA

LAHACIENDAGOLF.COM

Words Pete Simm
Location Cádiz, Spain

When you're looking to redesign and renovate a golf course, employing somebody with experience of working at Augusta National Golf Club is never a bad place to start.

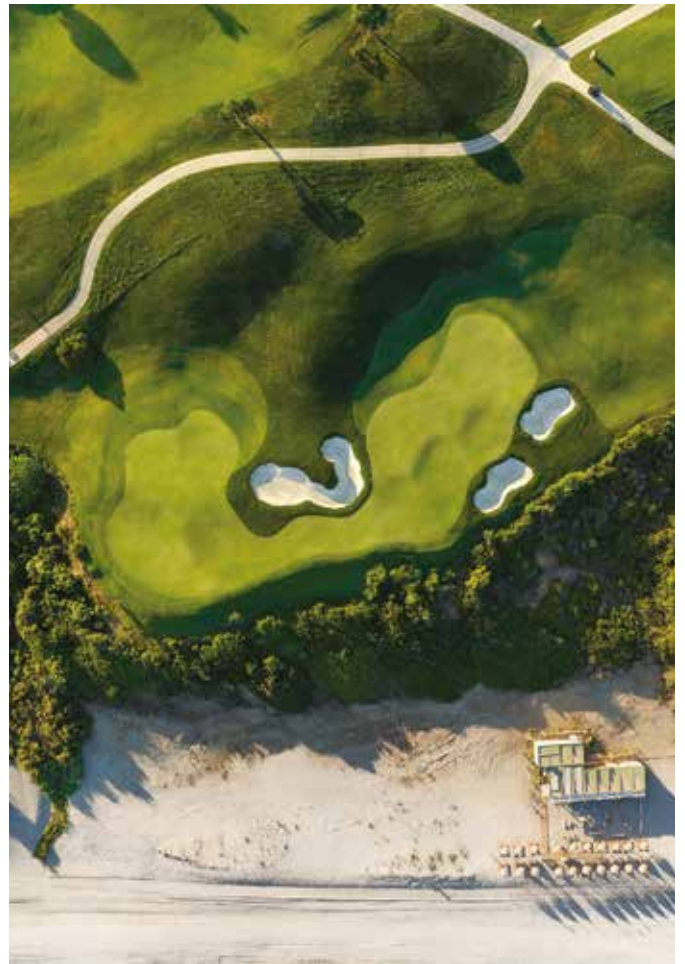
Home of The Masters, there are few more iconic venues in the game than Alister Mackenzie's layout in Georgia, so when the owners of La Hacienda Links Golf Resort in Spain were looking for a golf architect to breathe new life into their visually beautiful but tired Links course, up-and-coming American Kurtis Bowman came on the highest recommendation.

A student at Ohio State University, Bowman received his big break when, after much persistence, March Benson, who oversaw golf course maintenance at Augusta National for nearly 30 years, decided to give him an internship.

Having also gained invaluable experience at Nicklaus Design, Bowman took the decision to start his own company in 2016 and he has quickly earned a reputation for his creative and thought-provoking designs, with the Links course at La Hacienda helping to establish his reputation.







"THIS IS HONESTLY ONE OF THE MOST DRAMATIC AND SPECTACULAR VIEWS I'VE SEEN FROM A GOLF COURSE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD"

"Augusta is where I was given the biggest break of my career at one of the world's most iconic golf courses," said Bowman. "Not only because it was great to have on my resume but, more importantly, it gave me a lot of belief – I thought, if I can do this, I can do anything."

"My time at Augusta had a big influence on me and how I ultimately design golf courses. The way that a golf course plays, with ample room off the tee allowing golfers to find their ball and have a shot into the green, as well as the strength of the greens, are two elements that feature in all of my projects."

"I like to give golfers space and build a strategic layout for scratch or lower handicap golfers where they have to think and plot their way around, although it's equally important to me to make my courses enjoyable for less experienced or golfers with a higher handicap."

The renovation of the Links course is at the centre of a major upgrade that La Hacienda is currently undergoing, with other investment plans including a new five-star Fairmont hotel (opens in 2024), real estate, clubhouse, practice facilities, beach club and halfway house.

The original Links layout (which was formerly called Alcaidesa Links) was inaugurated in 1992 and designed by Peter Alliss and Clive Clark. Located in the Cadiz municipality of San Roque on Spain's Costa del Sol and overlooking the iconic Rock of Gibraltar, the course has always had a spectacular coastal setting but La Hacienda's new owners, Millenium Hospitality, quickly realised they needed a layout to match its outstanding setting.

Having first visited the site in 2020, Bowman spent the next two years upgrading and transforming the course.

Using Pebble Beach and Cypress Point as his inspiration, he built new tees, greens and bunkers, rerouted the layout and, in the case of a handful of holes, completely reinvented them.

Among the most impressive work to take place, the breathtaking fifth hole was entirely reshaped as a risk-and-reward par-five, while its green was combined with the 13th hole to make a huge double green perched on the edge of the Mediterranean, with a total size of around 21,000 square feet!

Bowman said: "I instantly fell in love with the property and saw the potential. It was my first golf course in continental Europe. It was a dream project for a golf-course architect, and I was going to do whatever it took to win that project. This is the type of site that can change the trajectory of one's career."

"Obviously, I was taken aback by the spectacular ocean views – some of the best I've ever seen on a golf course globally. The fact you can see the Mediterranean from the entire course, as well as the Rock of Gibraltar, just took my breath away."

"I instantly saw how much potential the site had, it just needed a more memorable golf course to match the setting. I wanted to connect the golf course to the ocean. There were some holes that were close and you couldn't even see the sea prior to the redesign. The tees were further away and plants would be up to five metres high blocking the view."

"Now, we really have a golf course that is benched in on the edge of ocean and there's nothing else like it in Spain."

As with any new golf-course design project, sustainability was a key focus for La Hacienda, Bowman and his team.

As well as using a warm-weather Bermuda grass on both the greens and fairways and installing a state-of-the-art irrigation system to significantly reduce the amount of water used, the resort has also introduced indigenous plants and native fescue grasses in out-of-play areas to reduce its use of pesticides and give the course an authentic links feel.

Spain is fortunate to have many great golf courses but any golfer choosing to leave the Links course off their list does so at their peril. It is interesting, fun, and has something for everyone, no matter what their golfing ability.

Perhaps the new-improved Links course is best summed up by Bowman himself.

He said: "There are lots of great golf courses in the Costa del Sol. One thing it was missing was a great oceanfront links golf course. As great as the other venues nearby are, none of them are set in a location even close to La Hacienda."

"This is honestly one of the most dramatic and spectacular views I've seen from a golf course in the entire world." **END**



ISAIAH MWESIGE

CEO, AFRIYEA GOLF ACADEMY



Founder and CEO of the AFRIYEA GOLF Academy in Uganda, Isaiah Mwesige, is attempting to give young Ugandans the same life experience that he has enjoyed thanks to golf. His story is compelling in its own right.

Orphaned at the age of 12, Mwesige struggled to complete his basic education. His elder brother Eugene brought him up and together they battled to earn enough money to support themselves.

Fast forward nearly 20 years and Mwesige is the founder of the AFRIYEA Golf Academy, which is unlike any establishment we are used to seeing in countries where golf is well established.

The Academy delivers free programmes that address the specific needs of the underprivileged youths and children who live in the proximity of the Academy itself. So, as well as offering free golf tuition, Mwesige's team delivers basic education, life skills and environmental education. A subject very close to Isaiah's heart.

Mwesige's introduction to golf is as obscure as it gets! It came through a close friend, Vincent Kasoro, who convinced him that he could earn good money at the 'local' golf club collecting balls.

I use the term 'local' broadly as the Toro Golf Club was a 14km walk there and back! Mwesige started by searching for and selling balls lost in the bushes and forest surrounding the Toro Golf Club in Fort Portal. This earned the now teenage Mwesige enough money for food and to keep him in school.

He quickly progressed through the Toro Golf Club, winning new opportunities along

the way. He first became a caddy, learning to spot balls and carry bags for the members giving him his first taste of the game.

His hard work, discipline and commitment earned him a promotion to Artisan just three years later, which gave him playing rights on the course at certain times.

He then went on to become the Head of Artisans, organising the juniors, allocating course maintenance tasks and tree planting – something that would become much more significant in his role as it developed.

If you have met Mwesige, it is easy to understand how this young man's spirit captured the hearts and minds of the members at The Toro Club. He is determined, joyful and passionate.

When the Toro Club needed someone to look after the course maintenance, it was decided that they would help Mwesige gain the agronomy qualifications he would need to take on that role. Although he could not have known it at the time, this was the first step in the journey that led him to create the Academy he now runs.

With a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Agriculture from the romantically named, Mountains of the Moon University, and qualifications gained in South Korea at Chonbuk National University and most recently a short programme at Salford University in the UK, Mwesige is firmly enveloped in a world of sustainability and the environment as well as golf.

His recent stint in the UK was funded by the Commonwealth scholarship scheme, which helps professionals from different Commonwealth countries to learn skills that



"GOLF HAS GIVEN ME SOME INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITIES AND HAS PUT ME IN A POSITION WHERE I CAN CHANGE THE OUTCOME OF PEOPLE'S LIVES IN THE COMMUNITY WHERE I GREW UP"

they can take back to their countries and use to improve the quality of life for their citizens. This year's theme was clean energy, clean air, and clean oceans, all of which resonate with the work Mwesige and his team carries out in Fort Portal.

"Golf has given me some incredible opportunities and has put me in a position where I can change the outcome of people's lives in the community where I grew up," explains Mwesige.

"We work really closely with the young people who come to the academy to educate them about the importance of maintaining the environment.

"Seeing the golf course makes them understand how important it is to protect nature. We also go out into the community to deliver education programmes, and organise plastic and waste collections. Together we are making a dramatic difference to our community."

That difference comes in many forms. Perhaps most notably in this context is the interest that there is in golf in Fort Portal, which has a population of around 60,000.

When Mwesige launched the AFRIYEA Inter-Schools Championship last year, he received entries from 14 schools. The split of players was 52 per cent boys to 48 per cent girls and two per cent of those who played were disabled children.

Imagine if this was happening in a developed country, with funding and infrastructure. We would all be bowled over.

Mwesige is a man ready to take on the world and his commitment to delivering education, golf, and better futures for the young people the academy serves has captured the attention of the good and the great of golf.

However, although his passion and dedication are clear, he continues to struggle to get the financial support he needs to help take the academy further. The challenge is that golf is incredibly young in Africa and even younger in Uganda.

The Ugandan Golf Union was only formed in 1961, and there is no Ugandan PGA, meaning that the talented players in the region leave to train and never return.

Mwesige's coaches can earn more money working abroad than they can working in

Uganda, which is why the support of events such as the recent Golf Talk UK golf day is so important.

The funds raised that day will provide fees, meals, pens, and books for ten children, pay three coaches for the month of June and cover motorcycle transportation to schools and communities. A little goes a long way in Uganda.

Although the challenges facing AFRIYEA are numerous, being a young golf country does also come with its advantages. There is no cynicism. There is ambition. And there is hope.

"My time in the UK has been a profound learning experience that has opened my eyes to the incredible work being done to preserve and protect our planet, as well as the work that remains to be done," comments Mwesige.

"I am leaving with a new-found appreciation for the environment and a renewed commitment to doing my part in building a sustainable future."

So, what does the future hold? Mwesige's ambition is that AFRIYEA Golf Academy becomes an inclusive and diverse destination for young people that provides a pathway for them to discover and achieve their potential. A pathway not dissimilar from his own.

In practical terms this means building a junior golf course and a classroom where they can learn a variety of life skills and soft skills.

He believes that this could lead forging relationships with academies around the world, very much like the one he has in place with the 3 Hammers in Wolverhampton, where the young golfers of each venue already meet online and go head-to-head in virtual golf challenges.

Mwesige is so much more than a CEO or founder. His position as an employer, a mentor, a role model, a father figure cannot be understated. He knows that by leaving Uganda, furthering his education and bringing knowledge back to his country he is inspiring the next generation to believe that they can do the same.

All he needs is the trust of others to raise the funds that make his dream of setting up a dedicated children's space a reality. **END**

HELP CHANGE CHILDREN'S LIVES

WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE GOLF FOUNDATION



You could say I had a typical route into golf. I was introduced to the game by my Dad at the age of 11; I had coaching with my local PGA professional; I came up through the junior ranks, spent endless hours at the club during the summer, playing competitions (including 'the Weetabix', a national Golf Foundation age group initiative of the time).

Today, I'm still a member of the club I joined as a junior. Yes, I've lived away from where I grew up for several years, played many rounds at different courses in the UK and abroad, and enjoyed everything the game offers: friends, fun, travel, education, experience, success (and failure), and even a career!

When I play with people now, one thing that often comes up in conversation is their grievance that they never took the game up earlier in life: as a junior. Well... step in the Golf Foundation, this is what we do.

For over 70 years, national charity the Golf Foundation has introduced children to golf. My favourite quote is by Founder member Sir Henry Cotton: "We should give the game without compromise, without intimidation, without prejudice, to as many as we possibly can."

Henry believed that golf should be available to everyone, regardless of their ability or personal circumstances. Today, the Golf Foundation introduces children to golf, from all backgrounds, creating golfers. We do this because golf can change lives.

Through our flagship programmes, we deliver golf to children and young people in schools, communities, and golf clubs.

Taking golf to youngsters in their own environment means that the traditional way of being introduced to the game through a parent or family member, doesn't necessarily have to be the case anymore.

Our Golfway equipment, designed and produced by The Masters Golf Company, can be used anywhere. The Golfway clubs are perfect for youngsters of all abilities, offering lots of high-energy games which are great for early achieving (very easy putting and chipping to start).

The games-based approach naturally encourages fun and engages the audience as well as inspiring confidence in teachers and volunteers who may have been nervous about trying an unfamiliar sport. Here we have a great introduction to golf that helps bridge the gap between the first hits in school or community group, and the first lesson at a golf venue.

Our Schools and Community Programmes are designed to culminate in a memorable and enjoyable experience at the golf club wherever possible. We can help clubs reflect their local community, change the perceptions of golf, and encourage participants to return for coaching, practice, or to play in the future, even if at present their primary focus is on another sport or activity.

This school to club pathway has been highly productive: in the ten-year period from 2011–2021; 500,000 children enjoyed a golf taster session at school with a PGA professional coach thanks to our strong links with The PGA, while our charity enabled 250,000 schoolchildren to enjoy a visit to a local golf club.





"WE SHOULD GIVE THE GAME WITHOUT COMPROMISE, WITHOUT INTIMIDATION, WITHOUT PREJUDICE, TO AS MANY AS WE POSSIBLY CAN"

GolfSixes programme has gone from strength to strength, growing in a short period. In 2022, we saw 542 clubs registered with 6,992 players in the fun six-a-side, six-hole inter-club format which is backed brilliantly by The R&A.

Feedback says that 83 per cent of young players loved being part of a team; high numbers of parents turned up to support the matches, while a key statistic showed a 47 per cent increase in affiliated membership across the participating clubs in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland – these figures perhaps underlining the confidence-inspiring nature of the format.

This year, we will be supporting over 750 clubs in GB&I.

Since I have been with the Golf Foundation, I have been close to how golf has impacted and changed the lives of the young people who have taken part in our programmes: those who found the confidence to overcome their shyness and shine like the bright young person they are; those who have overcome health issues and been able to take part in a sport that has given them a place on the playing field; those who have struggled with mental health and have found a safe environment in which to become stronger; and those who have found a passion for swinging a golf club regardless of their age, gender, ability, or background.

Over the last few years, we have been developing new ways to harness the unique physical and mental benefits of golf to help young people reflect on their situation more positively and gain more confidence in their lives: a need for support recognised by so many across sport and in schools after such a challenging three years for everyone.

A staggering 96 per cent of young people reported that their mental health had affected their schoolwork at some point. They told us how the lack of support they received for their mental health prevented them from fully taking part in and enjoying secondary school.

They described how low mood, fatigue, depression, and difficulty concentrating meant they had little energy or motivation to complete schoolwork. This was strongly supported by school staff, who nearly all

agreed (95 per cent) that a lot of students or some students had their schoolwork or learning affected by mental health problems.

Taking all this into consideration, all our programmes in schools, communities, and golf clubs now build in take-away life skills such as resilience, focus, self-control, and respect for others, which can be used outside of golf: in the classroom, on exam day, in public speaking and in their peer groups.

Our mental toughness programme focuses on helping young people develop specific mental tools as they learn to play golf. Mental toughness measures how well a person deals with stress, pressure, and challenge and is closely related to qualities such as character, resilience, and grit.

We continue to drive forwards with our work in schools, communities, and golf clubs to grow participation in the game, a crucial part of our charity's role.

It is important that young people can find a space away from the stresses placed upon them to enjoy physical activity, learn new skills, and have fun. Golf can do that.

We all have a responsibility to the game; to encourage youngsters into golf and help our sport and clubs continue to thrive. With the help of Sporting Insights, we estimate that the lifetime value of a golfer is £94,633 and that a golf club operating an HSBC Golf Roots programme, on average, generates an additional £5,580 of income per year.

With our programmes and initiatives working hard to introduce young people to the sport in less traditional ways than my own route, we must encourage all new players to stay. Entry to the game is changing and youngsters may not start and stay in the single same club forever, but that doesn't mean they can't be encouraged to gain a lifetime passion for the game.

Golf has been my life for as long as I can remember. My Dad (still) plays it at the age of 76, my husband works in it, my daughter can play it when she chooses, and I have a huge passion to encourage anyone and everyone to experience it for themselves.

More people can and should support the endeavours of the Golf Foundation. The game can give us so much if you let it. **END**

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"I'VE MET SOME AMAZING CHARACTERS, WHICH ONCE INCLUDED A DISCUSSION ABOUT BUNKERS WITH JACK NICKLAUS"



Words

Richard Allen
CEO
EcoBunker

GUEST BOOK

RICHARD ALLEN



Golf is addictive. Most people who've played it would understand this statement, even if it's a habit they've decided to kick. Golf certainly got into my head at an early age and now plays an even more important role in my life. It helps to keep a roof over my family; and does the same for all of my loyal colleagues at EcoBunker.

I'm not especially good at playing golf. But, I knew I was an addict when I found myself devoting (perhaps 'wasting' is a better word) much time sketching detailed designs of 'perfect' golf holes when I should have been paying more attention at school. I'm pretty sure none of my schoolfriends ever considered a career as a golf course architect, but little did I know that there were actually many others like me doing exactly the same thing.

I've sacrificed a few things along the way, but I don't think my addiction has done anyone great harm. I've invented and patented a golf construction method that has now been embraced worldwide and I've met some amazing characters, which once included a discussion about bunkers with Jack Nicklaus.

However, and I hope Mr Nicklaus will forgive me, my highlight is still winning my home town Club Championship. I had a bit of luck, but I did emulate my Dad's achievement and we became the first father and son to get onto the revered wooden board that usually takes pride of place in most golf clubs. Not all addictions are bad for you! **END**

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