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NUMBER 145 | WINTER 2023

Bluewater On Course To Eradicate Plastic Bottles At Home Of Golf



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"I REMAIN CONVINCED THERE REMAINS A FUNDAMENTAL FLAW IN THE WHS, WHICH IS THE REMOVAL OF THE 'BUFFER' ZONE"

FAIR COMMENT

Picture the scene: there I am enjoying the sun, stunning scenery, and wonderful golf courses of Costa Navarino, when I felt something strange. It was guilt. I felt guilty for something that was not my fault. I realised I was getting more shots on the course than my European contemporaries. It was a discrepancy within the World Handicap System (WHS), which I had confirmed to me after some email exchanges with the R&A, the CEO of How Many Strokes, Tonny Gottlieb, and the GM at my home club back in the UK, Felixstowe Ferry.

If this all sounds a little familiar then you're clearly a regular reader, as my concerns were included in an article in our spring edition penned by Christopher Stratford. The cause of the discrepancy, which you are probably aware of, by now, was CONGU nations using a different formula to calculate the slope index on a course than that used by the rest of the world, essentially Course Rating Minus Par.

I understand, that this is to be addressed among the significant changes to the WHS for the new season; specifically, CONGU nations will adopt the same slope rating as the rest of the world, meaning most golfers in those nations will lose shots, and slope-index boards will all need to be recalculated and re-printed. And that's why a digital solution such as How Many Strokes is such a great investment, but I digress.

Don't get me wrong, I applaud the changes and the readjustment of slope indexes to fall in line with the rest of the world, but I remain convinced there remains a fundamental flaw in the WHS, which is the removal of the 'buffer' zone...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/winter



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FEATURING

WINTER 2023



JOSÉ CARDOSO BOTELHO

TERRAS DA COMPORTA

"The reasons that we wanted to develop The Dunas Course were threefold – to be one of Europe's finest courses, to have a course in such an amazing location and the work that David McLay-Kidd had already done on the project."

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ED CHAPMAN

ROYAL AUCKLAND & GRANGE

"I came from working in a nice but small, traditional UK private club to suddenly getting a budget that was about \$120,000 revenue, to be brought in by coaching. I was, like, 'oh crap, how am I going to do that, that's so much?'"

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ALFONSO CASTIÑEIRA

LAS COLINAS GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

"Troon has always been there for Las Colinas, so I think that Troon now has a bit more visibility and they're clearer about what's going on at Las Colinas. And I think that Las Colinas is also benefiting more from Troon's resources."

30



STEPHEN HUBNER

JUMEIRAH GOLF ESTATES

"I would say about eight per cent of our colleagues are promoted every year. Sometimes they might move elsewhere but we're delighted when that happens if they are moving on to successful careers and we've played a part in that."

34



TOM WIDLEY

HOLYWOOD GOLF CLUB

"I recall saying at my interview, that the club needed to stand on its own two feet, and I touched on the fact that course condition needed to be number one, and service levels, number two."

42

"WE ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THIS NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH BLUEWATER, WHICH WILL BRING STATE-OF-THE-ART AND SUSTAINABLE HYDRATION SOLUTIONS TO ST ANDREWS LINKS"



COVER STORY

BLUEWATERGROUP.COM



St Andrews Links Trust has appointed sustainable water and purification experts Bluewater as its Official Hydration Supplier to provide a next-generation drinking water solution for golfers and visitors to the Home of Golf.

The pioneering agreement will see Bluewater, a global leader in sustainable water purification and beverage solutions, provide purified drinking water across the St Andrews Links estate through its innovative refill stations, supporting a commitment for the removal of single-use plastic bottles from the Trust's facilities.

The stations utilise the Swedish company's advanced SuperiorOsmosis™ treatment process, which removes more than 99 per cent of known contaminants from water, to provide locally purified and chilled drinking water at the point of consumption.

The refill stations will initially be installed in both the Old Pavilion next to the first tee of the iconic Old Course and at the Halfway House serving the Old, New, and Jubilee Courses with further installations at the Links Clubhouse, Golf Academy, and Castle Course Clubhouse.

Each unit will provide free-of-charge refills of chilled and purified water. The units also feature high-bright digital TV screens to communicate key information to visitors concerning wider sustainability initiatives across the world-renowned venue.

To commemorate the agreement, Bluewater has produced a special-edition line of

co-branded stainless steel refillable bottles – with free lifetime warranties – which will be launched for sale within St Andrews Links Trust's official retail program.

Golfers and visitors will then be able to collect a unique purpose-driven souvenir to enjoy chilled and purified water, while also taking home a vessel that has been designed and warranted to last a lifetime.

Neil Coulson, CEO of St Andrews Links Trust, said: "As a global venue and destination with sustainability and innovation embedded into our organizational DNA, we are always looking to collaborate with like-minded organisations who can bring world-class solutions to the Home of Golf.

"The sport of golf is intimately connected with the natural world, and for us as an iconic Links venue, the need to help protect our oceans and coastlines for future generations is paramount.

"We are all well aware of the terrible impacts single-use plastics cause to our environment, and so we are delighted to announce this new relationship with Bluewater, which will bring state-of-the-art and sustainable hydration solutions to St Andrews Links.

"Keeping our golfers and guests well hydrated out on the courses, and providing premium mineralised waters to complement our world-class dining experiences in restaurant service is a perfect and fitting solution for our estate, and our whole team is very excited to see this initiative launched." **END**

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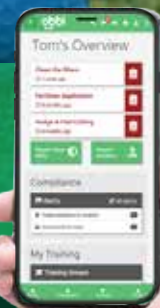
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TIME TO LIV AND LET GOLF

I thought I might be able to lay my antipathy to LIV Golf to rest following its proposed merger with the PGA Tour. But I'm nothing if not resilient and determined, so I'll see if I can eke out just one more polemic before the merger finally goes through on December 31. That is, of course, if it does happen on that day. Bloomberg recently reported that the merger – which, at the date of writing, remains under investigation by the US Justice Department – is likely to miss its deadline.

The Cambridge online dictionary – I can't be bothered to use a physical dictionary unless somebody pays me to do so – defines sportswashing as “the practice of an organisation, a government, a country, etc. supporting sport or organising sports events as a way to improve its reputation...” Golf, like many other sports, has sold its soul to the devil that is sportswashing – which is, apparently, acceptable, providing the price is right. Personally, I'm not making any money out of it, so I feel able to take the moral high ground.

Golf's not alone. Football's as bad, if not worse, and the Winter Olympics has been awarded to nations that shouldn't have even been allowed anywhere near the bidding process. Yet, this year's Ryder Cup proved the absence of players who've taken the LIV Riyal was not detrimental to the excitement and drama of golf's biggest competition – nor, indeed, the quality of play.

Rory McIlroy, newly crowned five-time European Order of Merit winner, who was the widely quoted poster boy of the opposition to the Saudi-backed tour, was hung out to dry by the PGA Tour when it agreed the merger. It was understandable that the Irishman should choose to step down from his role with the PGA Tour board – and although he claimed he was finding it difficult to balance his on and off-course commitments, it's also clear that he's tired of being embroiled in the politics of the sport. To lose somebody of his standing will be a blow to the Tour board, but it's one it will shrug off quickly, appointing somebody who will probably make fewer waves.

“Not what I signed for when I went on the board,” he said. “But the game of professional golf has been in flux for the last two years.”

The focus of LIV golf sceptics – and there are still many of them – will now turn to Tiger Woods, who joined the policy board in August. The 15-time Major winner has, himself, been sceptical of the Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund involvement, and his appointment is believed to have been partly a consequence of his contemporaries' concerns. Ironically, McIlroy – who initially described himself as a “sacrificial lamb” – has since welcomed the cessation of hostilities and believes a deal with the Saudis is preferable to other options being explored with US backers. Woods, however, is believed to favour the potential US investors.

It is disappointing that, in a memorable year for golf, money is still the driver of division. I just want to watch golf... but if somebody wants to pay me to do something else, well... **END**



NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



ZEN SWING STAGE BRINGS MOVEMENT TO DRIVING RANGES WORLD WIDE

The era of the super-immersive golf simulator has moved closer, with the launch of the adjustable Zen Swing Stage hitting surface for golf. Bringing accurate real-world slopes to golf both indoors and at the driving range, the new Zen Swing Stage moving floor is now available for shipping worldwide to enhance golf practice, lessons and existing golf technology. Extensively tested by PGA Tour and Ryder Cup players, the Zen Swing Stage puts a realistic golf course at your feet enabling golfers and coaches to create thousands of gradients safely on a stable 6ft x 8ft hitting surface which also takes a long tee peg.

SEARCH 'ZEN SWING' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



PGA CENTENARY COURSE TO BENEFIT FROM NEW RAINBIRD IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Gleneagles, the iconic Scottish hotel and global luxury destination, has commenced a state-of-the-art irrigation project on its Jack Nicklaus-designed PGA Centenary Course, former host to both the Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup. The significant five-month project will further enhance playing conditions across the 18-hole championship golf course and will see the installation of a new, highly-efficient Rainbird irrigation management system that will help reduce both water usage and power consumption.

SEARCH 'RAINBIRD GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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GOLFSTAR HEADS SOUTH TO LAUNCH FIRST FACILITY IN IBERIAN PENINSULA

GolfStar, Northern Europe's largest Multi Course Owner and Operator which operates 19 golf courses across 13 facilities, has announced its first expansion project on the Iberian Peninsula; GolfStar Cambrils. The facility has a 9-hole Pitch & Putt course, 20 bay driving range, short game area and a golf clubhouse situated within the grounds of Hotel Mas Gallau. The 40 room hotel is locally well-known for its high quality Mediterranean restaurant, wedding venue and event space.

SEARCH 'GOLFSTAR' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



INNOVATIVE GOLF MENTAL PERFORMANCE BUSINESS LAUNCHES IN SCOTLAND

A company dedicated to providing golf mental performance coaching to elite amateur and professional golfers has launched in Scotland, after appointing a well-known figure from the golf, drinks and whisky industry to head it up. The Scottish arm of Underpin Sports, which is dedicated to equipping players with the psychological tools and mental strength needed to overcome the pressure of competing at the very top of the game, will be led by Edinburgh-based Scott Dickson.

SEARCH 'UNDERPIN SPORTS' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



RYDER CUP CAPTAIN LUKE DONALD RECEIVES SIGNED CLUB CAR

Luke Donald's Ryder Cup captain's Club Car, signed by every player in Team Europe, is on its way to his home in Florida as a memento of the brilliant victory in Rome. Donald was presented with the buggy during the celebrations at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club on the Sunday evening, with Rory McIlroy saying a few words of thanks to his captain on behalf of the team. Club Car has been an official supplier to the Ryder Cup since 1997, and the tradition of the captain keeping his golf car began in 2002, when Sam Torrance led Europe at The Belfry.

SEARCH 'RYDER CUP' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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SUSTAINABLE ENHANCEMENTS AT JUMEIRAH GOLF ESTATES EARTH COURSE

The Earth Course at Jumeirah Golf Estates has undergone a sustainable rejuvenation ahead of the DP World Tour Championship, the final event in this year's Race to Dubai. With multiple course changes designed to improve the aesthetic and playing experience, one of the notable upgrades is the complete replacement of sand in all 100 bunkers on the Earth Course. In a commitment to environmental responsibility, the additional sand is both new and recycled, with a particularly vibrant white appearance that complements the desert backdrop.

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



MIDWINTER NORFOLK MORNING WINS BIGGA PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

A drone image showing the beautiful but harsh conditions faced by greenkeepers throughout winter has been revealed as the overall winner of the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) Annual Photographic Competition 2023 sponsored by Syngenta. Thetford first assistant greenkeeper and BIGGA member David Ball's image was chosen by competition judges as the overall winner, with the selection committee also taking into account the results of a public vote, held across BIGGA's social media accounts.

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



NEW CLUB CAR FLEET FOR AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB IN THE UAE

Club Car has supplied a fleet of 80 new golf cars to Al Zorah Golf Club, a unique luxury venue in the United Arab Emirates. The Troon Golf-managed club in Ajman, around 50km north of Dubai, lies in a protected area of large mangrove forests with rich biodiversity and changing tides, which alter the appearance of the Nicklaus Design course throughout the day. Al Zorah is deeply committed to sustainability, and has chosen Club Car's highly-acclaimed electric Tempo model to enhance the golfing experience of its members and guests..

SEARCH 'AL ZORAH' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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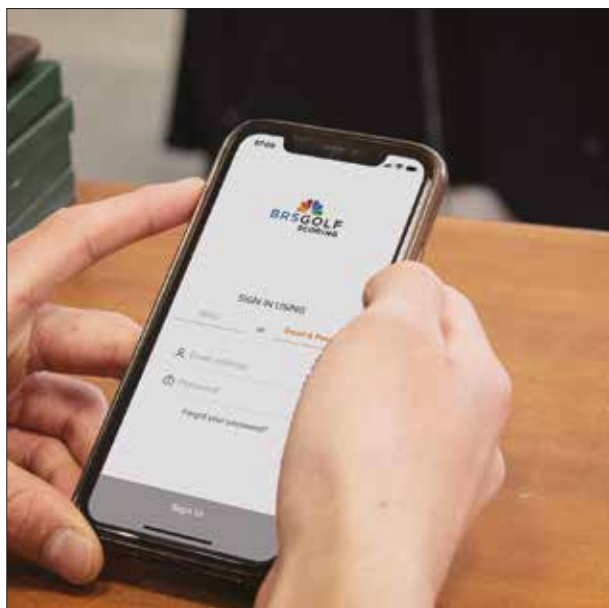
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YEAR-ON-YEAR GROWTH SHARED BY GOLF GENIUS AND BRS GOLF

Golf Genius, a leading provider of cloud-based golf software solutions, has announced year-on-year growth of its integrated competition management and tee time solution in partnership with BRS Golf. In 2020, the two companies formed a strategic collaboration to provide golf facilities with a combined, best-in-class solution that offers more choice to every golf facility seeking greater efficiency and value. The reported figures in product adoption and usage across GB&I demonstrates fast-growing acceptance amongst golf facilities of this value offering, including 12,500 golf events and 500,000 rounds powered by the BRS Golf and Golf Genius product.

SEARCH 'GOLF GENIUS' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ROYAL ASCOT GOLF CLUB COMMITS £500,000 MAJOR COURSE INVESTMENT

Work to transform Royal Ascot Golf Club's 18-hole course into one of the UK's leading playing facilities has begun. The move is part of a long-term investment strategy to enhance playing and social provisions at the club and build on its reputation as one of the best courses locally providing a year-round challenge to golfers of all standards. Each hole will be upgraded by enhancing drainage and irrigation provisions, bunkers will be renovated and new treelines created. The course will also look to establish signature holes and regenerate pathways on the 150-acre wooded crownland site to improve accessibility.

SEARCH 'ROYAL ASCOT' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



THE R&A AND THE USGA ANNOUNCE MAJOR 2024 WHS REVISIONS

The R&A and the USGA today announced the first update to the World Handicap System (WHS) as part of an ongoing review of the Rules of Handicapping and Course Rating System with a continued emphasis on accuracy, consistency and equity. The latest revisions will go into effect from January 1, 2024. Many countries have seen significant increases in the number of scores being submitted for handicapping purposes since the WHS was introduced, reflecting golf's broadening appeal. More than 100 million scores have been posted each year, unifying millions of golfers through a standard measure of playing ability.

SEARCH 'WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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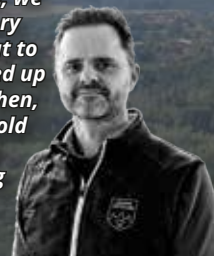
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// At first, joining the Boost Method consultation program - in order to develop our driving range - did not seem necessary. We were already pleased with our revenue at the range, and the idea of doubling it felt close to impossible.

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



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

Karl-Martin Härström
CEO / Club Manager
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AL HOUARA GOLF CLUB IN TANGIER, MOROCCO APPOINTS TROON

Troon has been appointed to manage Al Houara Golf Club in Tangier City, Morocco. The highly ranked Graham Marsh and Vijay Singh designed championship golf course will benefit from Troon International's management across agronomy, marketing and operations. Adding to their global portfolio, the Troon International division manage and provide services to resorts worldwide with courses across Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific regions. Troon International has vast experience in Morocco, having been engaged previously with multiple facilities including assisting with the development of Al Houara.

SEARCH 'AL HOUARA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



NEW MEASURES AT CAMIRAL GOLF & WELLNESS CUT WATER CONSUMPTION

Camiral Golf & Wellness (formerly PGA Catalunya), introduces new sustainability actions that will cut water consumption on its golf courses by 35 per cent and elevate the customer experience. Following a recent €1 million sustainability-focused investment in its Stadium Course and to Hotel Camiral, the resort is implementing new water reduction measures, which include reducing irrigated areas, changing turf variety and conducting a study to update its irrigation system with the latest water-saving technology.

SEARCH 'CAMIRAL GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



AL ZORAH CITY APPOINTS STEPHEN PAYNE AS NEW GOLF OPERATIONS MANAGER

Al Zorah City, one of the premier golf and lifestyle destinations in the United Arab Emirates, has appointed Stephen Payne as its new golf operations manager at the popular Al Zorah Golf Club. Payne – who began his new role in September – brings a decade of experience in golf across the UAE having worked at a number of Troon-managed facilities and at some of the Middle East's biggest and most thriving golf venues, such as Abu Dhabi Golf Club and Montgomerie Golf Club Dubai.

SEARCH 'STEPHEN PAYNE' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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Established in 1994 as the only gated resort with full amenities on the Caribbean island of Barbados, Royal Westmoreland boasts a par-72, 6,442 metre Robert Trent Jones II-designed course, offering superbly maintained fairways and greens that surround the luxurious estate.

The golf course is as enjoyable as it is demanding, and visitors will discover a mixture of challenging holes, the highlight being a collection of wonderful par 3's.

Enjoy the Caribbean sunshine and clear blue skies, whilst taking in the breathtaking views, thriving greenery and flourishing tropical landscape. Just be sure not to embarrass yourself, as the local wildlife – particularly the monkeys – will be watching on if you play a bad stroke!

The stunning sea views, immaculately landscaped grounds, world-class security

and exclusive lifestyle that Royal Westmoreland has to offer is an experience to be relished for any visiting golfer.

Rated as one of the finest courses in the Caribbean, once you've holed your final putt on the 18th green, be sure to head to the colonial-style clubhouse to enjoy some light refreshments.

With a selection of villas and apartments available for ownership on the resort, Royal Westmoreland also features a members only beach club on the famous Mullins Beach; fitness centre; salt-water swimming pools; clay tennis courts; clubhouse; short-game area and halfway house.

Royal Westmoreland in Barbados is a private estate with golfing access available to villa owners, rental guests and a limited number of tee times available for non-residents. **END**



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JOSÉ CARDOSO BOTELHO

CEO, TERRAS DA COMPORTA

TERRAS DA COMPORTA

As the chief executive of Vanguard Properties, the largest real estate developer in Portugal, José Cardoso Botelho knows more than a thing or two about being a success in business.

A self-confessed non golfer, the hugely likeable Portuguese had never been involved in a golf project prior to 2019, preferring instead to focus on other opportunities to grow the company that he founded in 2017 with Luso-Swiss millionaire Claude Berda.

Focusing on innovation and standards of the highest quality, Vanguard mainly operates in the luxury and premium residential and tourism sectors, but when the chance to purchase the spectacular Terras da Comporta development – situated around an hour's drive south of Lisbon – came up, it was too good an opportunity for Botelho to ignore.

With the previous owners, the Herdade da Comporta Real Estate Fund, having been declared bankrupt, it took a bit of time for Vanguard to acquire all the assets, with the complicated process finally completed in September 2019.

But with golf architect David McLay-Kidd back on board to complete the much-heralded Dunas Course – his first golf course design project in mainland Europe which he initially started in 2007 – Botelho has not regretted his decision for one moment as he has set about creating one of the most exciting and sustainable sports and lifestyle destination projects in world golf.

Terras da Comporta has made a flying start.

The Dunas Course has already won widespread recognition from players and the golf industry alike since first opening for play in June. Current plans include a second 18-hole course and numerous other sports facilities, with a wide range of plots for hotels, tourist and residential condominiums also on offer.

"The project may have a long history, but this is just the beginning", said Botelho. "Golfers will travel from far and wide to come and play here. The Dunas Course has put Terras da Comporta firmly on the map as a new golf destination, but there's more to come – much more.

"The reasons that we wanted to develop The Dunas Course were threefold – to be one of Europe's finest courses, to have a course in such an amazing location and the work that David McLay-Kidd had already done on the project. These factors made us realise the potential for an investment with Vanguard Properties' positioning, strategy and values.

"We are a brand dedicated to creating unique and unforgettable experiences, which involves devising and developing exceptional, sustainable and differentiated projects in unique locations, such as Comporta. And, obviously, golf had to be part of this model.

"So, when the opportunity arose to develop something with great personality and attention to detail, which also included an emphasis on sport and services, we decided to advance. The chance to create a truly extraordinary project about an hour from a vibrant capital like Lisbon is unique and unrepeatable.





"WE ARE COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE IN ALL OUR PROJECTS, AND TERRAS DA COMPORTA IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THAT"

"We couldn't be prouder of what we've achieved so far, and we're also very excited about what the future holds."

Vanguard Properties currently has 22 urban and tourist projects in its portfolio spread over upmarket locations in Lisbon, Oeiras, Algarve and Comporta covering a total above ground Gross Building Area (GBA) of around 1.027.781 m², in an investment worth more than €1.215 million.

It is Terras da Comporta that has got everyone in European golf talking, though, with the development set to transform the way that golf resorts are designed, created and managed in the future.

Terras da Comporta features two large developments: Torre, comprising 365 hectares of land and where a second course designed by Sergio Garcia is being built (set to open in 2025), and Dunas, which occupies around 1,011 hectares.

Created over 84 hectares of natural, sandy terrain on the coast in a secluded setting on the edge of the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, it's no wonder that McLay-Kidd was so keen to see The Dunas layout that he had first started 16 years ago reach a successful conclusion.

Alongside the golf courses, facilities for a wide variety of sports are planned (including tennis, pickleball, swimming, football and horse-riding) in addition to a number of luxury hotels, bespoke residential villas and residences, a school, library and hospital, and an array of shops and restaurants.

As with each company project, everything is being built using the best environmental, economic and sustainable practices and, with the vast majority of the properties, villas and buildings being constructed using engineered wood, Vanguard can proudly boast to creating the most sustainable golf project ever in Europe.

Botelho said: "We are committed to excellence in all our projects, and Terras da Comporta is an integral part of that. Nothing will compromise that principle and sustainability is the key element of this project.

"We have been very careful with the use of water, not only on the golf but in the entire development, and have our own treatment station in the compound that we use to irrigate the golf course and the gardens.

"We have a very sophisticated lighting system on the roads and have an energetic community where every house and building

will have solar panels to produce and share energy, keeping energy costs to a minimum. As well as that, all of the bespoke houses that we design and build are going to be net-zero houses in terms of CO₂ because they're being made from wood."

Impressive stuff, and the considerable benefits that the Terras da Comporta project will have don't end there when you consider the positive impact that the investment is having on the local region.

Comporta has always been an exclusive place to enjoy a summer holiday but, with an increase in the number of visiting golfers and high-quality leisure amenities combined with a change in working practices following Covid and the growing number of people choosing to move to Portugal to live and work, Botelho is confident that Vanguard's long-term vision to make the region a year-round destination will soon become a fantastic reality.

"In the past, people only came to this region in July and August to holiday because there was nothing else to do," said Botelho. "We will change that a lot because we are building golf courses, more sports, medical facilities and education. This project will create a lot of jobs.

"One of the issues that they have here is that the younger people, because they have no opportunities, they just want to complete their studies and leave, so the golf will attract people outside the summer months. There will be repeated business all-year round and that will create jobs.

"A lot of people are moving here from the United States which is amazing. They really like this area but you need medical facilities, schools etc, so people can live here the whole time. Then we are working on the cultural side.

"For the region, it's important that Terras da Comporta becomes a destination for golf. We could have made The Dunas Course closed but we didn't want to do that because it's important that we make the course available to everyone.

"Playing these 18 holes will be an unforgettable experience for any golfer, helping the region to become an outstanding golf destination boasting at least four courses."

If the other chapters of the Terras da Comporta story are anything as good as the first, then the golfing world is in for a treat. **END**







Words Christopher Stratford
Online ragcc.com

ED CHAPMAN

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, ROYAL AUCKLAND & GRANGE



A desire not to be the odd one out among his football coaching colleagues prompted teenager Ed Chapman to make a casual £50 investment that put him inadvertently on a career path that has since taken him around the world.

The then 16-year-old was working for Northampton Town Football Club in their community programme when a golfing day was arranged and he made the short trip to a sports outlet to buy a set of Donnay clubs because "I didn't want to be the only one who didn't go.

"I parred my second hole, a short par-4," says the now 37-year-old director of golf at the Royal Auckland & Grange GC in Auckland, New Zealand. "That was 2002 and I can still remember that vividly because that is the hole really that got me hooked."

That hole represented the first quarter-of-a-mile of a journey that would see him turn professional within three years before travelling thousands of miles to his current job via posts in Dubai, Hong Kong and Australia.

His first round of golf came while he was studying a Sports Science course at college and with plenty of time to practise plus an innate aptitude – he was an excellent cricketer and tennis player as well as football coach – he got down to mid single figures within two years at Overstone Park GC.

After turning pro, he joined Northamptonshire County GC as an assistant and, before qualifying as a PGA professional in 2009, his early travels took him to Sawgrass, Florida, on a club pro-am trip that enabled him to make a realistic assessment of his potential as a possible Tour player.

"I played really great and I shot, like, 75 around Sawgrass... Davis Love III had shot a 64 in a final round of the Players' Championship there," he reflects.

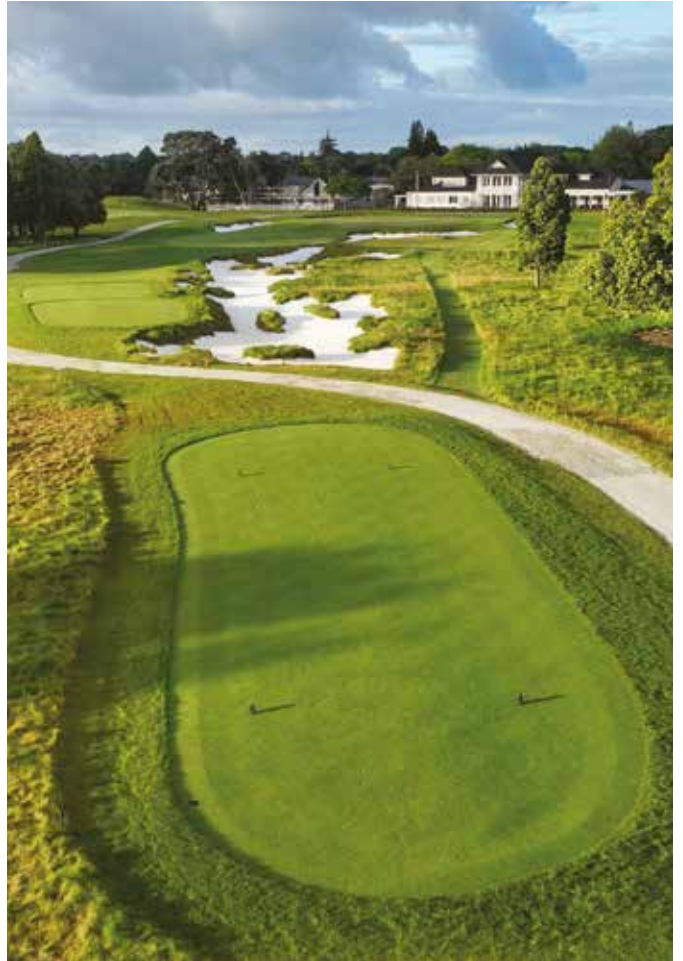
"I was pretty sure I wasn't going to be good enough anyway, but that really brought it home. I'd played pretty good, and I was 11 shots off in social golf conditions, more or less, compared to PGA Tour conditions.

"That's so many leagues away I couldn't see a path to get there, no matter how much practice there was."

He subsequently documented in a notebook the trajectory he wanted his career to take and it included working in Dubai, so when a friend and fellow pro advised him in 2011 that a place as a coach had become available where he worked at Al Badia Golf Club by Intercontinental, with the backing of his now wife Carla he applied and got the position, subsequently taking his first steps in golf management when he was promoted to the role as Al Badia's Golf academy manager.

"I came from working in a nice but small, traditional UK private club to suddenly getting a budget that was about \$120,000 revenue, to be brought in by coaching," says Chapman. "I was, like, 'oh crap, how am I going to do that, that's so much?'"

"Running the academy was in some ways being thrown in at the deep end of management because I went from having three coaches who were my peers to suddenly having to be their boss, even though they were either a similar age or a little bit older than me."



"RUNNING THE ACADEMY WAS IN SOME WAYS BEING THROWN IN AT THE DEEP END OF MANAGEMENT BECAUSE I WENT FROM HAVING THREE COACHES WHO WERE MY PEERS TO SUDDENLY HAVING TO BE THEIR BOSS"

The fact that he swam rather than sank in the management pool was illustrated when, in 2015 while looking for a new challenge, he landed the job as golf operations manager at Hong Kong GC, then 52nd among the Platinum Clubs of the World and home to the European Tour's Hong Kong Open.

With three courses and a membership around 7,500, he was plunged into an exacting six-day-a-week schedule, working 10 to 12 hours daily, although he did find time not only to gain a Masters degree in international business leadership and management, but also passed the R&A's Level 2 Rules of Golf exams and refereed in the China LPGA event there for three years.

No wonder he says the frenetic seven years he spent there "really did fly by" with the highlight being when he competed in the 2018 Hong Kong Open.

"We had a club spot which," and here Chapman stresses, "no one takes. Just the whole pressure; home club, members watching, unrealistic expectations that because you're a professional you're going to win.

"I'd just taken a group of members to South Africa on a golf trip, and I was playing really good and there had been some talks among some of the committee about it being good if one of the club pros would take the spot, so I got volunteered."

He missed the cut after being among the side of the field that was hit by a freak windstorm on day one – although he took only half a dozen shots more that day than playing partner and Ryder Cup player-to-be Robert MacIntyre.

"Robert is genuinely a world-class guy," enthuses Chapman. "He had just come up from the Challenge Tour, that was the season he won rookie of the year, and you could just chat away to him like he was your friend, no ego or anything – and you could tell he was an immensely talented golfer," added Chapman.

A year earlier, Chapman had played in the Hong Kong Open pro-am as a late replacement for former US PGA winner and Sky Sports Golf commentator Rich Beem and

had a brief meeting with MacIntyre's future Ryder Cup fourball partner Justin Rose that confirmed that the 2013 US Open champion also has a justified reputation as one of the sport's really good guys.

"I went to hand in the team scorecard to the registration place and Rose took his hat off and said, 'hi, I'm Justin,'" says Chapman.

"If he'd just walked past me that would have been really normal, but he's obviously seen another westerner, as such, who he didn't know, playing in the European Tour event, and he's just introduced himself. He is a really great guy too."

A search for a better work-life balance led Chapman to apply for the role of director of golf at The Metropolitan GC in Melbourne, a city he and Carla had visited and loved.

After a successful video interview process, he worked remotely from England for five months in early 2022, but when it became clear that a backlog caused by Covid could delay approval of his visa for as much as 18 months, both sides agreed it was best to terminate his contract.

The pair returned to England and Chapman made the most of his time by working as a voluntary greenkeeper at Northamptonshire County GC in order to improve his knowledge of course agronomy.

Six months later, in December 2022, he and Carla were heading for Auckland – as were their belongings, which had to be rerouted as they, at least, had made it to Melbourne from Hong Kong.

With Chapman one of the candidates to become Royal Auckland's next CEO it seems unlikely they will return to live in England any time soon, particularly with New Zealand having a seasonal climate that offers him a taste of autumn and "winters sitting in a country pub by the fire", a couple of things that he admits to missing about England while in Dubai and Hong Kong, along with the NHS.

"Living in Dubai, where there's no public health care system, you appreciate that the NHS – for all its faults – when you really, really need it, it's quite amazing," he said. **END**

ALFONSO CASTIÑEIRA

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, LAS COLINAS GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



Appointed earlier this year in March, 40-year-old Alfonso Castiñeira, is the latest director of golf at Las Colinas Golf & Country Club on the Costa Blanca in Spain.

Officially inaugurated in March 2011, Castiñeira becomes the fourth director of golf at the Spanish venue and plans to build on the success of his predecessors as he settles into life back in his home country following spells in Panama.

Hailing from Galicia, Castiñeira lives and breathes golf, and grew-up in La Coruña and was introduced to golf by his father.

"My father was a professional roller hockey player and played for one of the best teams in Spain, Deportivo Liceo, in my hometown," explained Castiñeira. "In football you have Real Madrid and Barcelona, and in hockey it would be Barcelona and Liceo. They are two of the biggest teams in Spain.

"When my father retired, golf was a natural sport for him to play – especially with less injuries – and I picked-up the game around the age of 11. I wasn't that great a golfer, but I do remember going [to the range] one day to hit balls with him, and my third shot actually went into the air and started flying and I said to myself, hang on a minute, I do like this! I basically developed from there, and by the time I was 17 I was quite a sports freak," smiles Castiñeira.

"I played football, hockey, and golf, and was a three-handicapper at the time."

Although his father introduced him to the sport, it was his mother who introduced him to the business of golf, when she suggested that he consider an academic scholarship in golf at Coastal Carolina University, with

his studies split 50:50 between the US and Barcelona.

"I must say that I wasn't a great student back in high school, so as a 17-year-old, I was either going to do Business Management or Law School, which in Spain is basically the two paths that you take when you are not sure what to do. I was never going to be a doctor or an engineer," recalls Castiñeira.

"Going abroad to live and study in Carolina was obviously expensive, and as an only child, my parents made a big sacrifice so as I could go and do the programme."

By the time Castiñeira finished his time in Carolina and had graduated with a degree in Professional Golf Management from the PGA of America, he was playing off scratch and hungry to test himself, both on and off the course.

Aged 23, he returned to Spain and gained his first break in management when playing in an amateur event at Desert Springs in Almería, when during one of the practice rounds a Spanish Federation representative asked if he would be interested in working at the venue.

"Before I started the tournament, I had a job offer in my inbox," recalls Castiñeira, who stayed for a couple of years as head professional before obtaining his Tour card and trying his luck on the Alps Tour.

"I had saved some money and was curious as to how far I could get as a Tour pro and wanted to give it a proper go. I said to myself that the worst thing that could happen would be to reach the age of 40 and look back and say that I should have tried.







"I LIKE TO BUILD ON WHAT MY PREDECESSORS HAVE BEEN DOING, BECAUSE I THINK THAT LAS COLINAS HAS HAD VERY COMPETENT PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH A GREAT VISION"

"I gave it a good go for three or four years but realised that I wasn't good enough to basically make a living playing golf on the main tour.

"I was then invited to return to Desert Springs as golf operations manager and stayed for another four years."

Ambitious, and keen to progress his career, in 2018 aged 35, Castiñeira realised that he needed to move away from Spain after failing to land a role in his homeland due to his lack of overseas experience.

"When I was not selected for the job, I did get in touch with human resources [at the destination] to get some feedback about my profile," he admits candidly, "and to ask for my career to develop, what did I need to add to my CV.

"They kindly answered that because of the business the destination operated, I needed more international experience, so when the opportunity to move to Panama came up later in the year, I knew that I had to go for it."

Castiñeira spent just over a year plying his trade as director of golf at the luxurious Buenaventura Golf Resort just outside Panama City, which at the time, was managed by Troon.

Sadly, following the untimely death of both of his parents, Castiñeira returned to Spain, assisting with the pre-opening of Golf Xaz in his hometown whilst dealing with personal matters.

"I always kept in touch with Troon, and they said at the time that they were lending me to my hometown for a couple of years, but whenever I was thinking about moving, to give them a call. Then another option came up in Panama.

"When I took the job at Santa María Golf Club, I told the GM that I wasn't planning on being in Panama for a long time and wanted to progress my career with Troon. I was happy in Panama, and everything was going well.

"Funnily enough, Santa María had just been selected as the host venue for the 2024 Latin America Amateur Championship, and in January, I was invited to visit the event which [this year] was held in Puerto Rico.

"At the same time, I was in conversation with Las Colinas Golf & Country Club about a return to Spain."

Although disappointed not to be able to oversee the Latin American Amateur Championship, the lure of landing the role at Las Colinas was too great for Castiñeira to pass by, and he took over the reins in March.

Only nine months in, what improvements or recommendations has Castiñeira seen that can help elevate the visitor experience at what was already, a world-class facility.

"I like to say that I like to build on what my predecessors have been doing, because I think that Las Colinas has had very competent professionals working with a great vision.

"So, nothing drastic, but I think it's just the little touches. So, there's things that we're looking at from the service point of view."

Minor improvements such as the removal of colour-coded tees and the repositioning of the starters hut are planned, but perhaps the biggest change will be behind the scenes with Troon being more involved.

"Troon has always been there for Las Colinas, so I think that Troon now has a bit more visibility and they're clearer about what's going on at Las Colinas. And I think that Las Colinas is also benefiting more from Troon's resources.

"In terms of marketing, we're taking advantage of their marketing efforts and Las Colinas is jumping on the back of that. So, Las Colinas Golf & Country Club is now more visible for certain operators networking with other Troon international properties.

"Also, one of the important things that Las Colinas is really keen on is ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) and trying to protect the environment as much as possible. It's important for us to show that we actually care about the environment and have protocols in place that we actually follow.

"I'm still learning about Las Colinas Golf & Country Club and I'm still trying to see how I can improve Las Colinas more than what it actually is, and from a golf point of view, there's always new stuff to learn." **END**



STEPHEN HUBNER

CLUB MANAGER, JUMEIRAH GOLF ESTATES



In a place where vast financial wealth and opulent golfing riches can sometimes distort reality, there's a straight-talking Scotsman with his feet firmly on the ground.

Stephen Hubner, club manager at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai, originally hails from the south side of Glasgow but has spent the past 17 years rising steadily through the ranks of Dubai Golf to lead one of world golf's most prized assets.

Boasting the Earth Course and Fire Course, Jumeirah Golf Estates is a regular host of those glamorous DP World Tour events and has become a bucket-list golfing destination for many in recent years.

Since being appointed to the role in 2022, his responsibilities have certainly grown but those old principles remain as the demand for high-quality golf in Dubai continues to thrive.

But although he is tasked with ensuring the rich and famous get the full five-star experience from their membership or visit, there remains a humble ethos in making sure the operation runs like clockwork and the enormous disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in Dubai can co-exist with minimal friction.

While his laid-back demeanour promotes that togetherness and team spirit among the staff he constantly refers to as "colleagues", he's also not prepared to allow any liberties to be taken by anyone with a misplaced sense of superiority.

Hubner said: "I'm a working class guy from the south side of Glasgow and you see a lot of wealth here but I'm not really a money-driven person so I don't get blown away

by it. I'm more focused on my family, relationships and doing something I enjoy, which is meaningful.

"There are probably some wealthy people who could perhaps do with having a view like that and it would help them.

"We try to give members a really great experience and we have fantastic relationships with so many of them. We play golf with them regularly, have dinner and a drink etc.

"We genuinely have a lovely member demographic and fantastic colleagues, but on those rare occasions when you sometimes see people treating people in the wrong way, we don't just let it go – we step in.

"If we have to suspend people from the club because of behaviour, we will do it. It is very important that our colleagues know they have the full support of the management team."

After cutting his playing teeth at Caldwell Golf Club in Renfrewshire, Hubner's own career progression saw him taken under the wing of Iain Darroch at Eastwood Golf Club before making the most of an unexpected opportunity to branch out.

Hubner said: "I worked with a great guy in Iain Darroch. He helped me learn about the pro shop business but also a lot with golf coaching and guided me in that direction.

"I met a girl (Leigh) and fell in love. She's an architect and had an opportunity to move to Dubai, so we both came out on a reconnaissance mission in 2005 and both just fell in love with the place.

"She went for a job interview and I was sitting there waiting. But then the owners



"HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP AND WATCH COLLEAGUES GROW AND DEVELOP IS A REALLY, REALLY GREAT PART OF THE JOB"

of the company loved golf and were then asking me all about golf when they were supposed to be interviewing her!

"They took me along to Arabian Ranches Golf Club the next day, I was then given the names of all of the directors of golf, got a few meetings and a few months later in 2006 we moved out."

A club-fitting position and then quickly a coaching role at Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club soon followed which then paved the way for a move into the operations side of golf business with positions as director of golf before assuming the position as club manager at Jumeirah Golf Estates.

But it is providing that same chance for career growth which Hubner is keen to pass on to his staff.

He said: "Having the opportunity to help and watch colleagues grow and develop is a really, really great part of the job. It's a big family and some of them have been with us at Dubai Golf for 35 years.

"I would say about eight per cent of our colleagues are promoted every year. Sometimes they might move elsewhere but we're delighted when that happens if they are moving on to successful careers and we've played a part in that.

"We put on colleague golf lessons all the time and they can play for free whenever they want when they are off duty, which doesn't happen at a lot of places.

"I honestly think the key to it is respectfulness and kindness. Some people need a bit of guidance, compassion and to help them come out of their shell and develop.

"If managers can understand that, it's massive. You want the team to want to work for you and want to do a good job, rather than having to do it because they might get into trouble or lose their job.

"Some managers think they need to be hard, or people need to fear you because you're the boss. It still surprises me when you hear that, to be honest."

Annual memberships at the club range from around £5,000 to £8,000 per year, but there are some attractive value options for visitors on a green fee too. You can play the Fire Course for less than £90 off-peak and even the Earth Course in the peak winter period is less than £270.

There are also two-for-one offers available during certain periods of the year and you may well bump into a Ryder Cup star

should you be plotting your way around the lush fairways.

Hubner said: "We've got 100 people on the waiting list for membership and we have about 1,000 golf members and 3,500 country club members. We have the two beautiful courses – Earth Course (home of the DP World Championship since 2009) and Fire Course.

"We actually hosted two European Tour events – the final two of the season – on two separate courses in consecutive weeks after the Nedbank was cancelled because of Covid.

"A fair amount of preparation goes into hosting an event but to then do it twice in consecutive weeks was pretty challenging, but a great experience.

"We've got an amazing academy at the club – the Tommy Fleetwood Academy at our DP World Golf Performance Centre. It's really been upgraded over the past year or so and Tommy is helping our coaches to develop and is just a lovely guy.

"Back in September, he's winning the Ryder Cup and the next, he was here playing with us in the members' Curry Club, which is just our nine-hole roll-up. I often see him out here practicing with his little boy Frankie, which is so nice to see."

Finding the elusive work-life balance alongside his wife Leigh and their two children – William (11) and Hana (nine) – can be difficult but Hubner has no plans to give up the sunshine of Dubai for a return to his roots.

He said: "I love coming back to the UK and Scotland every summer. We go back to do some cycling and hiking and the kids love it. My parents come out here for three-four weeks at a time, so it works well.

"We all love it here and I don't envisage going back anytime soon. There have been some opportunities to move to other parts of the region or the world but Dubai feels like home.

"We have come a long way at Jumeirah Golf Estates since I moved here in 2018, but I'm always thinking 'We have so much to do. I want to do this and I want to do that.'

"It's pretty busy all of the time. Trying to juggle being present at the club for all of the events, develop and help colleagues and family life is a difficult balance.

"But I still feel as if I've got some unfinished business here." **END**

EL SALER

GOLFENPARADORES.ES

Words Michael Lenihan

Location Valencia, Spain

When you think about golf in Spain, it's often difficult to look beyond the Costa del Sol and the many world-class courses such as Valderrama, San Roque and La Reserva in a part of the country often referred to as the 'Costa del Golf'.

Other regions of Spain must fight hard for their fair share of the golfing limelight, which perhaps explains why, the likes of El Saler in Valencia are never revered quite so much as their more illustrious counterparts further down the coast.







"ALL OF THE HOT WATER USED ON SITE IS GENERATED FROM SOLAR PANELS ON THE ROOF OF THE HOTEL, WHICH IS ALSO USED TO CHARGE THE GOLF BUGGIES"

Built in 1968 by Javier Arana, who is widely considered to have been one of the best Spanish golf course architects of his generation, El Saler ranks consistently in the best 60 golf courses in the world, and the top three in Europe.

And that's not a typo... yes, the top three in Europe, and not just in Spain. That's some accolade given the competition elsewhere in the country, yet alone Europe.

The course, which measures 6,042m (6,607 yards) meanders alongside the Mediterranean Sea, and through the El Saler Natural Park which boasts a native pine forest and sand dune system.

Its design also takes into account the protected landscape including non-native species such as the famous Cat's Claw, with the par-72 layout sharing similar characteristics to some Scottish Links.

And it was within this natural landscape that Arana crafted his masterpiece, which has hosted numerous professional events including the Spanish Open in 1984, 1989 and 2001; the Seve Trophy in 2003 and the Open de España in 2013.

And the man tasked with ensuring that El Saler is continued to be respected the world over is 58-year-old Francisco Contreras Alvarado, who is enjoying his second spell in charge, having returned to Valencia in April 2012.

Living on-site at the Paradores hotel, which Alvarado is also responsible for managing, he lives with his family just 70m from the first tee at El Saler and describes his job as a passion.

"It's a great city Valenica, and it's a great quality of life here as well," he admits. "It's a great place to live, and it's more or less a 20 second walk from my bedroom to my office, so I'm here all of the time."

The hotel, which has only 65 rooms, is part of the Paradores group, and is ideally located 30 minutes away from Valencia airport, or 90 minutes from Alicante ensuring smooth access from Europe and beyond.

Yet it is the domestic market which remains the core sector for Alvarado who commented: "We get a lot of Spanish people come and play at El Saler," which last year hosted over 60,000 rounds of golf, and this year is set to emulate that number.

El Saler is GEO Certified, and Alvarado is keen to stress the environmental aspects of the resort, which also includes a spa, and training facilities for professional sportsmen and women.

"We try to explain to visitors and guests how important our environment is, and we explain that all of the water that is used from the hotel is recycled and used to irrigate the golf course.

"All of the hot water used on site is generated from solar panels on the roof of the hotel, which is also used to charge the golf buggies.

"Earlier this year, next to the 17th hole, about 250 sea turtles were born, so we have signage to communicate to golfers that they are playing in a natural park, and to kindly respect the environment."

The par 3, 17th hole which Alvarado refers to is the signature hole at El Saler playing 195m (213 yards) into the prevailing wind, towards the beach to a green protected by five bunkers.

Finding the green, yet alone making par is an achievement, and is then followed by the par 4, 18th, with its elevated tee overlooking the beach with views north towards Valencia.

Heading back towards the hotel, pro shop and elevated bar area, the 18th is a monster of a hole which doglegs away from the beach towards the two-tier green.

But as Alvarado explains, the two finishing holes are not the only ones with some spectacular views.

"The first part of the course, which starts in the forest and extends to the fourth hole is superb. Then, once you've finished the fifth, you begin your climb towards the sea which is when the wind comes into play.

"You can then see the city and the Mediterranean – there are no trees and just the open space where you can see some boats on the sea.

"For me, it's a very, very nice view because the layout of the course has changed completely since the first few holes.

"The eighth hole is so close to the sea, and your close to the beach... it's simply incredible. And then you have the 17th and 18th which are so difficult, and are so exposed," concluded Alvarado **END**



Words Michael Lenihan
Online hollywoodgolfclub.co.uk

TOM WIDLEY

GENERAL MANAGER, HOLLYWOOD GOLF CLUB



Tom Widley is a man who is starting to emerge from the shadows.

General manager at Hollywood Golf Club in Belfast, Northern Ireland, it would be very easy for the 35-year-old to fade into the background when it comes to the day-to-day running of a golf club recognised the world over as 'The Home of Rory McIlroy'.

McIlroy's DNA is all over Hollywood Golf Club. A local lad, he grew-up just around the corner and learnt to play golf at the park-land course that overlooks Belfast Lough.

His association with the club cannot be underestimated – as soon as you enter the clubhouse, you get a feel for the connection, and the amount of pride that the members take in having one of the world's best golfers associated with their club. Even the wi-fi code bears his name.

And although McIlroy's involvement – and past financial support – should not be ignored, it's important to appreciate that he has no influence in the day-to-day running of the club. That remit falls squarely on the shoulders of Bristol-born, Tom Widley.

A late comer to the game of golf, Widley only picked-up his first club aged 15, and within a four-year period, was playing off two. "I played a lot of golf around the age 18, when I should have been working on my A-Levels," he recalls.

"My attention was easily grabbed by other things, and as I loved playing golf, I practised all the time. In the summer, I'd play twice a day, multiple times a week."

Accepted into university to study business, Widley declined the offer, instead opting to pursue a career in golf.

"I knew myself well enough to know that if I went to university, it would have been more about having fun – which is not a bad thing. So, I thought it was probably a safer and more sensible option to move towards [a career] whereby I could learn and work at the same time."

That decision has since paid dividends, and aged 19, Widley got his break when David Griffin – now director of golf and leisure at Celtic Manor – offered him his first role working as a PGA trainee professional at The Bristol Golf Club, then operated by Crown Golf.

Widley spent seven years working in Bristol, and during this period, met his partner Katherine – who hails from Hillsborough, Northern Ireland – which partly explains how the next few years saw his career yoyo between Belfast, and the west country.

"Crown Golf were in a transition period [in 2014] and were in the process of selling off some of their clubs, so at the time I was happy to move back to Katherine's parents [in Belfast] which is how the job working at Darren Clarke's Golf School came about.

"It was good, the students were great but it was also cold and wet," laughs Widley.

The couple moved back to Bristol once Katherine had finished her PhD, so Widley landed a role as a golf coach at Long Aston Golf Club which is where, after a couple of years teaching, he realised that he wanted to progress a career in management.

"In my last year at Long Ashton, I would be working six days a week, for ten to 12 hours a day, so I was a busy coach. It was physically demanding and by the end of the day, my



"I RECALL SAYING AT MY INTERVIEW, THAT THE CLUB NEEDED TO STAND ON ITS OWN TWO FEET"

back and knees would be aching, which is when I asked myself 'can I do this for the next forty years?'

"I remember looking at the GM at Long Ashton at the time thinking, rightly or wrongly, that I could do that job. I knew that I didn't want to coach any longer, so decided that I wanted to move into the admin side but needed some experience that was relevant to business, and not coaching."

Widley left Long Ashton in October 2018 – taking a year's sabbatical from the industry – before cutting his teeth on his first managerial position at Worlebury Golf Club, just outside of Bristol, spending two-and-a-half years in the role before a vacancy captured his attention.

"The general manager's job here at Holywood wasn't advertised in the traditional way," said Widley. "It wasn't on the GCMA website or even the Irish GCMA's website... I saw it on LinkedIn and applied."

"It was quite a forward-thinking job description, which is what appealed."

So Widley returned to Belfast at the end of April 2022, armed with a remit to shift the focus back onto the golf course at Holywood, where a new £2 million clubhouse refurbishment – partly funded by Rory McIlroy – had taken centre-stage arguably to the detriment of the course.

Part of that clubhouse redevelopment included a state-of-the-art academy equipped with a gym, five indoor bays, three Trackmans and two HD simulators. But as Widley explains, as spectacular and grand as the new clubhouse is, it does bring financial pressures.

"Before this was here, it was very much a normal members club, it was a smallish clubhouse with a normal number of members and now it's not. This is not a clubhouse you'll get at a normal member's golf club," he explains.

"So, we have to staff it, and need the income streams to actually support those costs."

In homage to their benefactor, part of the new clubhouse includes a Rory McIlroy themed trophy room crammed full of memorabilia from his playing career, including bags from the Ryder Cup, and Major championships.

"It's a lovely thing to have," admits Widley, aware that the trophy cabinets help attract overseas visitors.

And perhaps in a reflection of where the previous focus was directed, the club has often attracted more visitors to McIlroy's trophy room, than it did to the course itself.

But one gets the impression that in Widley's short 18-month tenure, Holywood Golf Club is shifting towards becoming a golf club known more for its course and service levels, than its association with McIlroy.

"I recall saying at my interview, that the club needed to stand on its own two feet, and I touched on the fact that course condition needed to be number one, and service levels, number two."

Widley accepts that there is work to be done on the golf course, with drainage a key aspect especially in a part of Ireland that has an awful lot of rainfall.

Working with architect David Jones, Widley has plans to improve the drainage which he described as "priority number one," admitting candidly: "In the winter, this golf course becomes a bit of a hodgepodge of holes, as the front nine becomes very, very wet – we have drainage issues that run from our second hole all the through the fifth, seventh and eighth holes."

"More often than not, the second, fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth are often closed as they get very wet, or we operate dropping from the fairway into the rough."

"So, for me to give value to members above more than anything else – which in turn will improve our green fee income – we have to have 18 holes playable. If we're open, we're open, and not open with just nine or twelve holes."

"So our first priority is drainage, and then we'll start looking at bunkering and how the bunkers drain away. We don't have a huge amount of bunkers, and have removed a couple in the last year, and are looking at ways to help them drain."

Holywood Golf Club will always be associated with Rory McIlroy, but if Widley gets his way, the best compliment he can have, would be for the club to be known equally for the quality of its golf offering, rather than merely it's most famous benefactor.

Even Rory would endorse that. **END**

EXCLUSIVELY YAMAHA WITH 450 GOLF CARS AT THE ASHBURY GOLF RESORT



The Ashbury Golf Resort is situated in over 500 acres of beautiful rolling countryside with stunning views over Dartmoor, seven miles north-east of Okehampton in Devon. It offers an unrivalled 103 holes of golf, all on one site, resulting in it being the ninth largest golf resort in the world. An impressive accolade for a British golfing destination.

With four 18-hole courses, an 18-hole par 3 course and a 9-hole academy course all on one site, the resort offers golfers a new challenge every day.

All courses have been designed using the natural features of the landscape, with mature trees, hedgerows and lakes integrated into each course, together with 25 miles of buggy paths to facilitate the largest golf car fleet in Europe at the world's 9th largest golf complex.

The Ashbury Golf Resort is the ideal all-year-round golf venue and in winter months the management team offer at least the equivalent of two 18-hole courses open at any time. There are a total of 60 winter holes, which ensures maximum enjoyment for golfers and enables essential course maintenance to be carried out.

These holes have been chosen based on years of historic data, which has found them to be the driest. As a result of superior construction techniques there are no temporary greens as standing water drains quickly.

The main tees are in play, whenever possible, but there are also large purpose-built artificial teeing areas.

As you would expect at a such a resort it has an extensive golf car fleet and has a long relationship with Yamaha, their pre-

ferred supplier of over 450 premium golf cars.

With 25 miles of buggy paths, the cars can be used all year round on all of the courses. There is also a selection of 'all-season' cars, which are fully cabbed, providing complete protection from the weather.

Chris Back is the workshop manager and is responsible for a team of five full-time mechanics; two who work on the golf car fleet and the smaller course maintenance equipment and the other three on the larger equipment and heavy plant equipment owned by the company.

"We are exclusively Yamaha and have in excess of 450 of their golf cars here, which makes us the biggest commercial operator in Europe. About 60 per cent are electric with the remaining 40 per cent petrol driven, with 100 cars having all-weather cabs for winter use. Everything is maintained in-house and each car has its own comprehensive service record," he said.

"We are completely self-sufficient and use an online computer system, which links directly to Yamaha's UK headquarters in Woking for ordering genuine parts and accessories. We have an excellent working relationship with them, which is important as the owners have a policy of purchasing only good quality second-hand cars and Yamaha will always notify us when the right type of vehicles are coming off lease from another customer.

"Sometimes, for example, there'll be ten in good condition and maybe a couple damaged, but that's not an issue to us as they can be used as donor vehicles.





"OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YAMAHA IS FIRST-CLASS; IT HAS TO BE AS WE ARE SUCH A LARGE OPERATION. THE GOLF CARS ARE LOW-COST AND MAINTENANCE IS RELATIVELY EASY"

"You would think that managing a fleet this size would be problematic, but we have two golf car marshals (three in high season) who look after them on a day-to-day basis for maintenance. They are responsible for checking them over when they return and making sure they are clean and fully charged or topped up with fuel when they go out."

Yamaha golf cars have a reputation for reliability and, although these at the Ashbury Resort are in regular use, they require very minimal additional maintenance.

"We have two large undercover garage facilities, close to the golf shop where the golfers collect their keys," Back added. "The garages operate on a one-way system so that when one buggy leaves it is replaced by the next in line. At the start of each day you will find 60 cars ready for use in the all-day golf car area in the main pick-up park."

"We have a mix of electric and petrol for a very good reason: our longest course is the Kigbeare at 6,528 yards and the furthest from the clubhouse, so it's sensible to use the petrol cars here. For safety reasons, we have dedicated buggy lanes on the shared vehicle areas around the clubhouse, car parks and accommodation facilities."

"The golf cars are on the paths all-year round, which obviously helps protect the playing surfaces, the only exception is for golfers with disabilities. 99 per cent of golfers use the buggy paths, which are a mixture of tarmac, concrete or hardcore, depending on the different phases as the site developed."

"Winter is obviously the quiet period when we do a lot of maintenance and repair work. If batteries, a new motor or controller needs replacing we'll pull the vehicle off the fleet and do it, and they won't go out again until the new season in April or May."

"As I said earlier, our relationship with Yamaha is first-class; it has to be as we are such a large operation. The golf cars are low-cost and maintenance is relatively easy, especially with the electric cars and they work hard for us."

Gary Sizmur is the deputy courses manager at Ashbury Golf Resort and works

closely with Chris Back. He is one of the 18 full-time members of the greenkeeping team, which includes three who are predominantly employed on construction projects, plus five part-time/seasonal workers.

"On a property this size, we always have some construction projects ongoing across the estate," he said, "but we have a talented team of grounds staff, combined with significant investment in specialist equipment, which means we can keep all our courses maintained in peak condition. The result is that golfers can enjoy our facilities, year-round."

"Playability and access to the courses is a prime driver behind all we do here. Over the years we have built on our experience of the winter market and how best to maximise our clients' enjoyment during periods of inclement weather."

"With this in mind we have developed a 60-hole plan which is three x 20 holes, which gives us 18-holes plus two backup holes on each loop, utilising historical data from previous winters to select the driest holes from our mix of courses."

"We ensure they flow well and although there may be a little distance between green and tee, the route is always clearly marked. We always have a minimum of two 18-hole courses available and allow the use of our Yamaha golf car fleet, all-year round."

"As previously stated playability is important and in order to facilitate this a lot of our cutting heights differ from other courses."

"Our fairways are mown to 15mm, the semi-rough to 24mm and the rough at 33mm to aid the speed of play. We also appreciate that through the winter months that the ball does not travel as far on landing, so we will reduce the length of some of our longer holes to take this factor into consideration," said Sizmur

"We never use temporary greens; on some holes we have constructed alternative greens, which are just smaller versions of the main green and, on those we haven't, we have built the greens larger and incorporated tiers in order to provide alternative putting areas." **END**

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"EMPLOYER BRANDING IS MORE THAN JUST A LOGO OR A TAGLINE; IT'S THE AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION OF YOUR CLUB'S VALUES AND CULTURE"



Words

Michael Herd
Head of International
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GUEST BOOK

MICHAEL HERD

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THE MOST TRUSTED NAME IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH AND CONSULTING

In the competitive landscape of golf club management, a robust employer brand isn't a luxury – it's a strategic necessity. Beyond the well-manicured greens and pristine facilities, the success of any club hinges on its ability to attract and retain top talent.

Employer branding is more than just a logo or a tagline; it's the authentic representation of your club's values and culture. It forms the foundation upon which prospective employees build their expectations, and current staff members base their loyalty. Start by defining what sets your golf club apart. Is it a commitment to professional development, a tight-knit community, or a dedication to environmental sustainability?

Whatever it may be, clarity in your club's unique value proposition is key. Utilise media channels effectively to broadcast your employer brand. Platforms like LinkedIn can be powerful tools to showcase your club's culture, employee testimonials, and opportunities for growth.

Engage with current staff to organically amplify your employer brand. Encourage them to share their experiences and be advocates for the club. Positive word-of-mouth within the industry can be a potent recruitment tool. Investing in your employer brand isn't just an HR initiative; it's a strategic move to elevate your club's overall success. A compelling employer brand becomes a silent partner in attracting the best talent, fostering loyalty, and ensuring the sustained growth of your club. **END**

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