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DP World Tour Q-School Praises New Hills Course At INFINITUM





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"ONCE SOMEBODY'S LOYALTY HAS BEEN ABUSED, THEY'RE HARDLY
LIKELY TO ALLOW YOU TO DO IT AGAIN: 'FOOL ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU;
FOOL ME TWICE, SHAME ON ME'"

FAIR COMMENT

Customer service, both good and bad, is often spoken about in golf and beyond. In our industry, good customer service is recognised and rewarded — and rightly so — often with 59club championing the cause. Loyalty, however, isn't quite such a hot topic.

Maybe that's understandable, because it works both ways; a symbiotic commercial relationship, if you like. And it's not as easy to measure as customer service. But, get it wrong, and — unlike a one-off experience of a drop in customer service standards that can be rectified by further employee training — the result can be terminal, whether the perpetrator is a multi-national corporation or a small golf club. Because that comes from management and not staff on the front line.

Once somebody's loyalty has been abused, they're hardly likely to allow you to do it again: 'fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me'.

I'm speaking from personal experience, here, too. My home club, in the UK, gives me a 10 per cent discount on all food and beverage purchases, to reward my loyalty. Titleist rewards players' loyalty with a four-for-three promotion, every season, on Pro V1s, and even the golf retailer from where I purchase regularly, rewards my loyalty by giving me a discount of five per cent every time I order.

My wife and I always shop at the same supermarket, because its loyalty points can be converted to Avios points, which can be used with British Airways (BA)...



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/comment/153



FEATURING

WINTER 2025



MIGUEL GIRBES

APHRODITE HILLS

"We're adjusting the membership structure and raising prices, especially for categories like afternoon-only memberships. The goal is fewer rounds, but higher yield – focusing on premium service and attracting guests who want the best."

22



LIONEL GARDES-BUS

TERRE BLANCHE

"I discovered that I didn't really enjoy law anymore, and I started wondering what I was going to do with my life... what would come next. Since I was a child, I always wanted to become a lawyer, but after three years, I knew it wasn't for me."

26



RODRIGO ULRICH

TERRAS DA COMPORTA

"The Torre Course is completely different in nature to The Dunas Course and has been created so that we can provide two outstanding but very different golf experiences that complement each other."

30



ENZO LUCIAN

ROYAL PALM MARRAKECH

"My aim is to stay with Fairmont because it's a beautiful course, a beautiful environment at the hotel, and with Fairmont, if I do a good job, I can maybe move to another Fairmont."

34



MIKE BUSH

ST. MELLION

"I'm so proud to receive such a prestigious award, and I am hugely grateful to 59club for this rare accolade, but I see this as much as a win for my dedicated team and for the glorious St. Mellion landscape which we have cultivated."

42

"THE RECENT ENHANCEMENTS TO THE HILLS HAVE ADDED ANOTHER LAYER OF QUALITY TO WHAT IS ALREADY A WORLD-CLASS VENUE"



COVER STORY

INFINITUMLIVING.COM



INFINITUM

INFINITUM has once again underlined its reputation as one of Europe's leading tournament venues, earning widespread praise from players, caddies and officials after hosting another memorable edition of the DP World Tour Qualifying School Final Stage.

The six-day event, held from November 7-12 on Spain's Costa Dorada, brought together 156 hopefuls competing over 108 holes across the Hills and Lakes courses for a coveted place on the 2026 DP World Tour.

Zander Lombard came out victorious, whilst 19 other players also secured their cards for next year, including Eddie Pepperell, Mathew Baldwin, Adri Arnaus and Shabhankar Sharma.

This year's event – the seventh time that Final Stage has been hosted at INFINITUM and the first of an extended three-year partnership with the DP World Tour – took on added significance as the first professional competition to be staged on the Hills' new-look back nine, which reopened in September after a significant redesign led by Dave Sampson of European Golf Design.

At the heart of this year's changes is a complete overhaul of the 18th hole, which has become one of the most dramatic in Europe thanks to the introduction of an island green-style finale.

The project represents the halfway point of a two-phase transformation at the worldclass.golf destination aimed

at cementing the Hills' status as one of Europe's leading tournament venues and resorts.

The Lakes course, which underwent its own highly lucrative upgrade last year, is now fully embedded and played host to the dramatic final two rounds of competition.

Joaquín Mora Bertrán, deputy general manager at INFINITUM, said: "Q-School is the highlight of our golfing calendar and an event that means a great deal to everyone here.

"I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to the DP World Tour for allowing us to host once again, and to our exceptional greenkeeping team who work tirelessly to ensure both courses are in tournament condition throughout the week. Their dedication and attention to detail are central to the success of this event."

Mike Stewart, director of Qualifying School, said: "We would like to thank everyone at INFINITUM for hosting another outstanding Final Stage of Qualifying School.

"The feedback from players and caddies has been extremely positive, particularly regarding the condition and setup of both the Hills and Lakes courses.

"The recent enhancements to the Hills have added another layer of quality to what is already a world-class venue, and we are delighted to continue our partnership with INFINITUM for this important event in the golfing calendar." **END**

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KNOWLEDGE AS AN ASSET, ENABLING ME TO CONVERSE COMFORTABLY
WITH GOLF PROS AND F&B MANAGERS ALIKE"



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MY GOLFING MENU OF DELIGHTS

I reckon 95 per cent of what I know about golf and the golf industry has been learned since I started writing for this publication, 28 years ago. Before that, my knowledge was limited to the fact that I knew I was never going to be a very good golfer, and the retention of sufficient facts and figures to enable me to do reasonably well in the sports round of our local quiz league.

That probably doesn't come as a surprise to regular readers of this column, but I felt I should be open and honest for the benefit of relative newcomers.

I will caveat this by claiming that, while not an expert in any particular field, I do now possess enough nuggets on many facets of the sector to be able to, at least, not look completely dumb at industry events. I think that's probably the lot of many journalists who don't spend their entire day working on one particular topic. And you know what they say: a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

However, I prefer to think of the tasting menu nature of my knowledge as an asset, enabling me to converse comfortably with golf pros and F&B managers alike... providing they don't get too technical. All these admissions are cathartic, so I'm going to continue in that vein. For a start, I'm very much a fair-weather golfer. I don't mind playing in the cold, although being on the large side, the addition of extra layers makes my swing look even worse.

But I detest playing in the rain. This stems from an experience I had in Wales – no surprise there I hear some of you say – when, in the middle of what passes for a Celtic summer, I was at the furthest point from the clubhouse, dressed in shorts and polo shirt, when a storm blew up seemingly over my head. I've been drier when swimming. By the time I had reached the clubhouse, the course was unplayable and every dimple, crevasse, and lump of my upper body was visible through my now seemingly diaphanous shirt.

It was a horrendous sight for everybody in the clubhouse, as you can imagine. Since then, I have refused to even contemplate golf if there's the possibility of rain. There's only so much humiliation one man can take. And the addition of rain to my golf game just exacerbates the situation.

Finally, and, arguably, my biggest admission: I've never had an official handicap. I've never felt the need. I've never been a member of a club, as I've never wanted to play the same course, week in, week out. I'm not competitive; I'm purely a social golfer; and, more importantly, I'm crap! If you gave me 72 shots on the golf course, I reckon you'd still beat me – probably 7&6 if it was matchplay.

But, as a writer, I reckon I'm a steady mid-handicapper, and it's served me well. And I can recall who won the 1964 US Open. I'm nearly 63, you know... **END**

NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



ARABELLA HOTEL GOLF & SPA UPGRADES CLUB CAR FLEET

Club Car has delivered a new fleet of golf carts to the prestigious Arabella Hotel Golf & Spa in South Africa. Located on the beautiful Western Cape, the 5-star resort received 56 lithium-ion Tempo vehicles to enhance the golf experience on its magnificent Peter Matkovich-designed 18-hole championship course, consistently ranked in the top ten courses in the country. The vehicles, delivered by AFGRI, the official Club Car distributor in South Africa, have premium features such as Comfort seats and Visage GPS connected technology.

SEARCH 'ARABELLA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



LAY OF THE LINKS GETS UPDATED AT CABOT HIGHLAND

For Cabot Highland's Course Manager James Hutchison a new course build, world-class golf conditions to maintain and a reputation to uphold are all part of the day job. Luckily, with a Toro Total Solution agreement, he has a fleet of Toro machinery, a new irrigation system and back up support from Reesink Scotland to make the job easier. The Castle Stuart course has long been a Toro customer with both Toro machinery and irrigation maintaining the acclaimed links in Inverness and now the new Old Petty course, designed by renowned architect Tom Doak, will be too.

SEARCH 'CABOT HIGHLANDS' ONLINE

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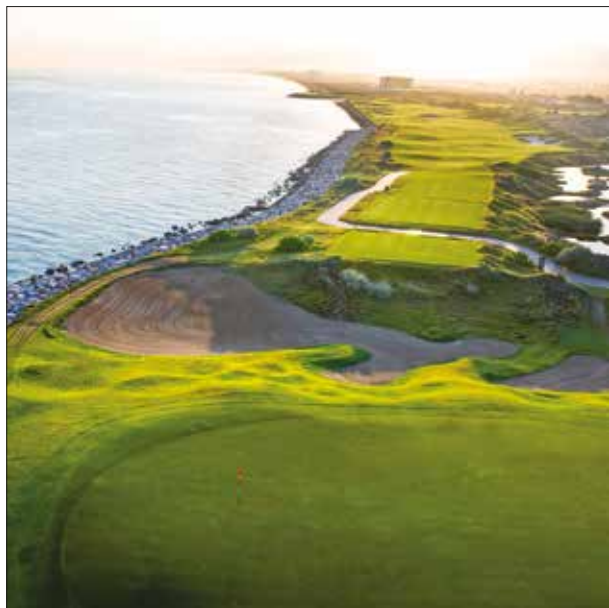
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AL MOUJ GOLF SEES NEW ERA OF GROWTH UNDER TROON LEADERSHIP

Al Mouj Golf, Oman's premier golf destination, continues to set new benchmarks in performance, quality and international recognition under the leadership of Troon Golf. The partnership between Al Mouj Muscat and Troon reflects a shared commitment to elevating Oman's presence on the world golfing stage and advancing the nation's growing reputation as a regional hub for sports and leisure tourism.

SEARCH 'AL MOUJ' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



PLATFORM GOLF CELEBRATES SKY SPORTS GOLF WIN AT BROADCAST SPORT AWARDS

The innovative broadcast partnership between PLATFORM Golf and Sky Sports Golf has been recognised on one of sport media's biggest stages, with coverage of The 153rd Open Championship named 'Best Visual Story Telling Using Data & Insight' at the 2025 Broadcast Sport Awards. The winning entry saw Sky Sports Golf integrate a custom version of PLATFORM Golf's TrueSlope technology into the Open Zone, transforming shot analysis of key moments with unprecedented realism.

SEARCH 'PLATFORM GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



THE DRIFT RENEWS WITH TORO IN DUAL DEAL WITH SISTER CLUB

Over the last five years, The Drift in Surrey has invested over £2 million to bring in new facilities and improve the course in preparation for its 50th anniversary in 2025 and a key element of that process was the signing of a fleet lease deal with Toro and Reesink Turfcare. Tom Parrish, General Manager at The Drift, provides an update on the works and what's next for the impressive 18-hole championship course, as the club signs for another five years, in a dual deal with its sister club, Badgemore Park in Oxfordshire.

SEARCH 'THE DRIFT' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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SCAN ME



LINKS KENNEDY BAY RE-OPENS WITH ECOBUNKER TECHNOLOGY

One of Australia's leading golf courses, Links Kennedy Bay, has fully re-opened following an 18 hole re-design that includes the addition of over 100 pot bunkers featuring synthetic revetted faces from UK bunker specialists EcoBunker. The ambitious project was led by former Tour professional and acclaimed course architect Graham Marsh, working alongside Western Australian industry leader Trevor Strachan. With the original back nine sold for development, the redesign required a brand-new back nine as well as the rerouting of holes five to nine.

SEARCH 'LINKS KENNEDY BAY' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



OBBI ANNOUNCES AVALON YACHT CLUB PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGIC REBRAND

Obbi, the award-winning compliance, operations, safety and training platform for clubs, has announced a major strategic evolution in its brand and market positioning. Formerly known as Obbi Golf, the company will now expand to Obbi Club, reflecting its growing role in supporting a broader range of clubs – including yacht, leisure, city, and country clubs – worldwide. The announcement coincides with a new partnership with the Avalon Yacht Club in New Jersey, USA – led by Joseph A. Mendez, CCM, CCE, General Manager – who has chosen Obbi Club to support the club's ongoing commitment to operational excellence, safety, and member experience.

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



FIRST PREMIUM SUSTAINABLE AGRONOMY VENUE IN CENTRAL EUROPE ANNOUNCED

The R&A has welcomed Golfclub Breitenloo in Switzerland as the first club in Central Europe to work with The R&A Sustainable Agronomy Service under a R&A Sustainable Agronomy 'Venue' premium support agreement. Becoming an R&A Sustainable Agronomy Venue means the club will receive tailored agronomic expertise and the highest level of support communicating and showcasing best practice in course management and sustainability.

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

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LAGUNA GOLF PHUKET STRENGTHENS TEAM WITH TWO KEY APPOINTMENTS

Laguna Golf Phuket is pleased to announce two key appointments as part of its ongoing commitment to delivering exceptional golf and leisure experiences. Stephen Chick has been appointed as General Manager, while Asmitha Sathish has joined the team of PGA Professionals as Assistant PGA Professional. Chick brings over 15 years of international golf management experience, having worked in the UK, the Middle East, China, Thailand and Myanmar.

SEARCH 'LAGUNA GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



ROYAL PALM MARRAKECH APPOINTS ENZO LUCIAN AS NEW DIRECTOR OF GOLF

Fairmont Royal Palm Marrakech has announced the appointment of Enzo Lucian as Director of Golf. With over twelve years of experience in managing international golf clubs and developing academies, Lucian brings to Fairmont Royal Palm a recognised expertise and a vision firmly focused on innovation and excellence. A PGA France and Luxembourg certified professional since 2011, Lucian has built an impressive international career through roles at prestigious venues such as The Oitavos Dunes (Portugal), Pestovo Yacht & Golf Club (Russia), and Club Med Golf Academies (Portugal and Spain), where he was co-founder and Head Pro.

SEARCH 'ENZO LUCIAN' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



AL HAMRA REOPENS ALL 18 HOLES FOLLOWING ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Al Hamra Golf Club, one of the Middle East's premier championship golf courses and multiple DP World Tour host venue, fully reopened all 18 holes today following a comprehensive renovation project designed to elevate the playing experience while preserving the course's distinct character. The 90-day project, initiated by Al Hamra Golf Club which oversaw the design changes with the original course architect Peter Harradine and his team at Harradine Golf, included the complete redesign of holes 15, 16 and 17, as well as modifications to the sixth and eighth holes.

SEARCH 'AL HAMRA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



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TOMMY FLEETWOOD ACADEMY LAUNCHES AT YAS LINKS ABU DHABI

As the world's top golfers descend on Yas Links for the DP World Tour's Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship, the iconic venue today announces the launch of the Tommy Fleetwood Academy (TFA) — marking a new era for player development in the UAE capital. Following the recent significant upgrade of its state-of-the-art training facilities, the academy will now operate fully under the Tommy Fleetwood Academy brand, expanding the partnership between Viya and one of the sport's most admired figures.

SEARCH 'TOMMY FLEETWOOD ACADEMY' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



WILSON GOLF ANNOUNCES CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP WITH CENTURION CLUB

Wilson Golf has announced a new multi-year corporate partnership with Centurion Club. Under the agreement, Wilson Golf will receive full membership privileges and establish Centurion Club as an additional brand headquarters for activities that reinforce the brand's ongoing commitment to innovation and performance. The partnership will also position Centurion Club as the centre of Wilson Golf's UK operations, offering a strategically located base for sales meetings, product showcases and corporate events.

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



PORTMARNOCK RESORT DEBUTS INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Portmarnock Resort, home of the acclaimed and recently redeveloped Jameson Golf Links, has launched an international membership offering for the first time. Exclusively available for golfers living permanently outside of the island of Ireland, the membership includes access to the highly praised design, originally laid out by Bernhard Langer in 1995. A multi-million-pound project to further elevate the course, including the elevation of tee boxes and greens to create even more dramatic ocean views, was completed in 2024.

SEARCH 'PORTMARNOCK RESORT' ONLINE
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NEW DESTINATION

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Following the opening of a new clubhouse, Al Zorah Golf & Yacht Club in Ajman, UAE, has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf – a portfolio of the world's premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

Ajman's first golf course, Al Zorah has been masterfully designed by the Nicklaus Design group, and is set amidst one million square meters of preserved mangroves, offering a unique blend of pristine fairways and greens that seamlessly integrate with the natural environment.

The course's design emphasises the preservation of its surroundings, featuring native sandy areas, diverse wildlife, and 12 km of stunning waterfront. The constantly changing tidal system adds an extra layer of challenge, altering the course's appearance and feel throughout the day.

Golfers will enjoy the exceptional conditioning of the paspalum grass and the advanced golf cart and GPSi technology available. The 350-meter driving range, accommodating up to 50 players, is perfect for warming up or fine-tuning your swing with Callaway range balls.

Commenting on the latest addition to the growing portfolio, Michael Lenihan, CEO of worldclass.golf said: "I visited Al Zorah last year during construction of the clubhouse, and it was evident that once the project had been completed, the visitor experience would be exceptional, and so it has proven to be.

"GM, Phil Henderson has done a sterling job at Al Zorah, and I look forward to working with Phil and his team over the coming years to showcase the destination as one of the finest in the UAE." **END**



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MIGUEL GIRBES

DIRECTOR OF GOLF & SPORTS, APHRODITE HILLS



After a four-year hiatus away from club management, Valencian-born Miguel Girbes returned to the fold earlier this year when he took over the reigns as director of golf and sport at Aphrodite Hills Resort in Cyprus. And it's fair to say that he's never been busier.

Having worked at standout destinations previously such as PGA Catalunya (now Camiral), Finca Cortesin and Emporda – all in Spain – it was only a matter of time before the 47-year-old returned to club management following a period founding PlayInOne, a golf travel business.

So, when the opportunity to relocate to Cyprus, and spearhead Aphrodite Hills Resort following the departure of Andrew Darker to Limassol Greens presented itself, Girbes jumped at the chance and has wasted little time in stamping his authority on the worldclass.golf destination.

Among the most visible improvements is the new starter hut near the first tee as Girbes explains: "We saw an opportunity to really enhance the golfer's experience right from the start. This facility, which replaces the previous structure, is now equipped with a fully outfitted kitchen, restrooms, and a patio area, so now, guests can enjoy fresh pizza, burgers, sandwiches, ice cream, and drinks all in one place.

"We wanted to make sure people can grab something before their round, mid-game or at the end of their round."

The resort is also preparing for the introduction of GPS ordering, which will allow golfers to place their food orders from anywhere on the course.

"Imagine you're finishing the third hole, and you realise you want a burger at the ninth. With GPS ordering, it'll be ready when you get there – hot and fresh."

While the clubhouse remains a central gathering spot, the new starter hut creates another layer of guest service. "It's all about giving our guests choices and making their day memorable," he adds, his enthusiasm unmistakable.

His pilgrimage to Cyprus has seen Girbes make personal sacrifices, and at just 16, he left home to pursue education and golf in the United States, thanks to a scholarship that covered both high school and university.

"It was a huge leap," he remembers, adding that living and working in countries like Spain and the US taught him that success depends as much on people as it does on the product. Upon returning to Europe, Girbes's path turned toward sports management and resort operations, and gravitated away from playing professionally, to golf operations and commercial management.

"Early on, I realised I wanted to create places where people felt welcome, not just run tournaments," he said.

At the end of 2020, Girbes made a deliberate decision to leave a previous role due to differences in management style. Reflecting on that period, he shared: "It was a tough decision. There were plenty of offers in Spain, but I wanted stability for my family and a chance to build something lasting."

When the opportunity in Cyprus came along, it promised both professional fulfil-





"MOST GUESTS WANT MORE THAN JUST A GAME – THEY WANT EXPERIENCES, MEMORIES, AND CONVENIENCE. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE BUILDING"

ment and a better quality of life for his family, who soon joined him after his initial move in January this year saying: "Cyprus is about security, climate, and quality of life. For my kids, it's been a great change."

Under his stewardship, the resort is evolving from a real estate-focused operation to a holistic hospitality destination. "We're investing in everything – from the golf course and hotel to sports facilities and restaurants," he said.

By collaborating with neighbouring golf courses such as Limassol Greens, Secret Valley and Minthis, he has created a destination, allowing guests to sample a range of experiences with the resort acting as a central booking point.

"Most guests want more than just a game – they want experiences, memories, and convenience. That's what we're building."

Ongoing infrastructure projects are central to Girbes's vision. "We're renovating every bunker with new drainage and lining, but keeping the classic design intact," he explained. Furthermore, the resort will see a new golf academy building, expanded retail space, and a driving range elevated with Trackman technology.

Beyond golf, upgrades extend to tennis and padel courts, the gym, restaurant spaces, and hotel rooms. A refurbished clubhouse and continued improvements in hospitality are also on the horizon.

Membership and visitor relations are always a balancing act, and Aphrodite Hills hosts approximately 45,000 rounds each year, with around 10,000 played by members, who number about 300 and enjoy reserved tee times.

"We're adjusting the membership structure and raising prices, especially for categories like afternoon-only memberships," added Girbes. "The goal is fewer rounds, but higher yield – focusing on premium service and attracting guests who want the best."

The pro shop, too, has shifted its inventory, now emphasising branded apparel and accessories that have proven popular with visitors.

Girbes does not shy away from addressing service challenges. "We're working on a dedicated bag drop area and more attentive service on the course. Staffing is always a challenge, but customer experience must come first."

The resort's clientele is primarily British, with increasing numbers from Germany, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe. "British golfers love Cyprus for winter play. We're also reaching out to Scandinavians and Germans."

"Direct flights from the US are limited, but we're exploring new partnerships and events to attract Americans too," he said, keen to promote the resort in North America.

The experience of moving between countries has shaped his philosophy, and for the first time in his career, he hasn't set himself a time limit as to when to move on.

"I've lived in so many places, but Cyprus feels like home – a place where my family is safe and happy." After years of change, he says, "it's a relief to be settled and see my work make a real difference."

"I want to build a team that's proud of what we do and a place where guests feel they belong. Our recent investments are about positioning the resort as one of the best in the region. It's about matching demand with service, so guests always get great value."

He remains focused on elevating Aphrodite Hills Resort, nurturing a true sense of community, and shaping a destination that stands out for its quality and warmth. For him, every improvement is not just about facilities but about making every guest's experience unforgettable.

To further appreciate the scope of his ambitions, one must look at the way he views both the industry and the wider community.

He recognises that a resort is more than just a collection of services and amenities – it is, at its heart, a gathering place where people reconnect, celebrate, and find respite.

"Golfers might come for the course, but they return because of the memories they make and the way they're treated," Girbes observed.

His belief in sustainability is apparent not only in the environmental upgrades to the destination, but also in his approach to human resources, and is dedicated to hiring locally whenever possible and to providing ongoing training and professional development for staff.

"Investing in people is investing in the future," he remarked, "because the right team is what truly sets a resort apart." **END**





LIONEL GARDES-BUS

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, TERRE BLANCHE



In the world of golf management, few journeys are as inspiring as that of Lionel Gardes-Bus. From modest beginnings as a seasonal greenkeeper, he now serves as director of golf at Terre Blanche, one of France's most prestigious resorts. His career embodies passion, adaptability, and lifelong learning.

Gardes-Bus's entry into the golf industry was anything but planned. As a 19-year-old law student uncertain about his future, he accepted a summer job as a greenkeeper at a golf course in Sainte-Maxime, managed by Blue Green.

"I was looking for a summer job, actually between May and October, alongside my studies. I had the opportunity to work as a greenkeeper on this course, and that's how I discovered golf," he recalls.

He had never played the game before; what drew him in was not the sport itself, but its environment.

"I used to watch golf on TV, but I had never played, and in fact, I had never even been on a golf course," he laughs.

"The first time I arrived on the course, I was on a mower cutting greens, learning how to behave on a golf course, and I immediately fell in love with the atmosphere — I loved working outdoors in nature."

After three years of studying law, Gardes-Bus realised that he was no longer passionate about it, and that summer job became a turning point.

"I discovered that I didn't really enjoy law anymore, and I started wondering what I was going to do with my life... what would come next.

"Since I was a child, I always wanted to become a lawyer, but after three years, I knew it wasn't for me," he admits.

His parents were initially sceptical about his decision to give up law for a career in golf, but Gardes-Bus was determined. After starting as a greenkeeper, he seized the opportunity in February 2004 to join the soon-to-open Four Seasons Resort Provence at Terre Blanche, now known simply as Terre Blanche.

"At that time, we were still in the pre-opening phase," he recalls. "I knew I needed to leave Blue Green if I wanted to grow my career, and I felt the time was right for a new challenge."

"One day, while reading a newspaper — the internet wasn't such a big thing back then — I saw that a new Resort was opening with two golf courses in Tourrettes. I sent in my CV and, fortunately, was offered a position as a course marshal."

Over the years, he worked his way up through the golf operations, sports events management, reservations, and marketing departments, and in January 2023, was appointed director of golf, succeeding Jean-Marie Casella.

His rise was not without challenges, and he credits much of his development to learning from others — especially from his long-time mentor, Jean-Marie Casella, with whom he worked for 15 years.

"He taught me how to manage a golf course," he says. "He has an incredible amount of experience."

With his academic background in law, Gardes-Bus had developed strong research



"DESPITE THE LAST TWO RYDER CUPS BEING HELD IN EUROPE, I THINK FRANCE — AND PROBABLY ITALY AS WELL — ARE STILL NOT WELL KNOWN AS GOLF DESTINATIONS"

habits, and spent countless evenings — often late into the night — studying every aspect of golf management.

"I spent hours learning how to improve myself, reading books, attending training courses," he explains.

He also highlights the human richness of his journey saying: "I've met so many brilliant people at Terre Blanche, and I've learned from everyone I've worked with over the past 20 years."

Terre Blanche now has a clear strategy on the importance of Golf in the resorts future development and is building a team to achieve their objectives. The Resort has ambitious plans to rethink and enhance the already exceptional golf experience at the resort in the south of France — notably through a recent partnership with Troon.

Reflections are also underway with European Golf Design and Turfgrass to modernise the two courses — Le Riou and Le Château, both originally designed by Dave Thomas.

Although nothing has yet been finalised, Gardes-Bus is keen to improve the efficiency and sustainability of course maintenance while preserving the courses' unique character and playability.

"One of our main goals is to make course maintenance more efficient, as is the case for many golf facilities in southern Europe today. We are considering reducing the number of bunkers while keeping the iconic design elements of Dave Thomas, which are very important to us.

"We are extremely proud to have two Dave Thomas-designed courses, and we don't want to change their shape or their defining features — especially the trees — as they are part of the course's signature.

"However, we can make the management more efficient by reducing the size of some bunkers and softening certain slopes. This would make it easier to use machinery on the course and limit manual work, which can often be very complex."

The discussions also include renovating the greens, in light of the environmental regulations now in force in France, particularly regarding the use of phytosanitary products.

"The Labé Law, which came into effect on January 1, 2025, makes course management — especially on the greens — very complicated," explains Gardes-Bus. "We are therefore planning to renovate our greens, because we know that in the future, we will have no choice but to rely more on mechanical operations and move away from inputs."

Despite his administrative responsibilities, Gardes-Bus makes a conscious effort to stay close to the course and his teams, taking the time to be on-site whenever possible, even though he rarely plays himself.

"I spend a lot of time on the golf course; otherwise, I'd probably spend 95 percent of my time in the office," he smiles. "With the experience I have today, I make sure to go out on the courses every day, because I know how important it is to stay close to the teams and the guests.

"It's so easy to stay behind a screen answering emails. With the huge number of emails we receive each day, if I didn't take the time to go out, I could easily spend two or three months without leaving my office."

Gardes-Bus remains clear-eyed about the challenges facing golf in France, particularly compared to more established markets such as Spain or Portugal.

While events like the Ryder Cup have helped raise the profile of French golf, he observes: "Despite the last two Ryder Cups being held in Europe, I think France — and probably Italy as well — are still not well known as golf destinations. Competition across Europe is strong, so it's essential for resorts like Terre Blanche to gain greater visibility."

At 46, Gardes-Bus remains motivated, fulfilled, and happy in his role, with no plans to move on.

"As long as I wake up in the morning and I'm happy to come to work, I see no reason to change," he says.

"I don't want to change just for the sake of change. Even though I've been at Terre Blanche for a long time, the grass isn't necessarily greener elsewhere. When I arrive in the morning and leave in the evening without noticing the time passing — still taking the same pleasure in what I do — that's when I know how good I have it here. **END**

RODRIGO ULRICH

GOLF GENERAL MANAGER, TERRAS DA COMPORTA



In today's modern world, Rodrigo Ulrich is something of a rare breed.

While many of us will have had lofty ambitions at an early age of becoming anything from a professional sportsperson or a famous actor or actress to an astronaut, singer or even, (heaven forbid), a leading politician, there are very few people that go on to have a professional career in the job that they dreamed of.

But that is exactly what has happened to Ulrich, golf general manager at Terras da Comporta in Portugal, and it is a situation that is not lost on the Portuguese.

"It sounds strange, but I am very lucky and always wanted to work in golf," said Ulrich. "From a very young age, the sport fascinated me, not just the game itself but everything that surrounds it: the people, the environment, the constant pursuit of excellence. It is so much more than just hitting the ball."

Having launched his career in the golf industry at the start of the century, Ulrich spent the best part of two decades working in a number of key positions at golf resorts across Portugal before landing the role that he holds today.

Now responsible for the day-to-day running of one of Europe's most talked-about new golf destinations – Terras da Comporta officially inaugurated its second 18-hole championship layout, The Torre Course, in October – Ulrich is hugely proud of what he has achieved, and the many years of hard work that he has put in along the way.

Just as importantly, though, he remains very humble at his achievements and proud

that he is the person to have been chosen to lead such an exciting project.

He said: "I think the biggest break that I've had in the game which helped me to where I am today was to manage clubs that were in serious financial difficulties and successfully turn them around.

"To achieve this, I had to do everything, from mowing the fairways for two years (the shareholder used to joke about my "not-so-straight lines") to raking bunkers and clearing bushes, while also serving as the company's director. Those years taught me humility, resilience, teamwork and the importance of leading by example.

"It's an honour and a true privilege for me to work with such an extraordinary team and for such a visionary company. I genuinely love coming to work every day. There's an incredible sense of purpose and passion that drives everything we do at Terras da Comporta. We want to create so much more than just a golf game and are focused in providing a golf experience that is as unforgettable as possible."

Terras da Comporta is made up of two large developments: Torre, comprising 365 hectares of land in the Alcácer do Sal municipality, and Dunas, which occupies around 1,011 hectares of land in the Grândola municipality. Both enjoy tranquil and beautiful locations in dense pine forest, with Torre lying near Comporta Village and its iconic rice fields while Dunas, eight kilometres to the south, sits next to Praia do Pego beach.

Vanguard Properties, the estate's owners, could not have selected a finer setting for their first foray into the world of golf.







"IT HAS BEEN OUR AIM FROM THE START TO CREATE THE MOST SUSTAINABLE RESORT IN EUROPE"

Occupying a secluded spot on the edge of the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, the estate is around a one-hour drive south of Lisbon in the highly sought-after region of Alentejo and is a glorious mixture of sprawling sand dunes and towering pine trees.

Ulrich, 52, took up his position at Terras da Comporta in 2022 after leaving his position as executive director at Palheiro Golf, and he hasn't looked back since.

Having launched The Dunas Course – renowned architect David McLay-Kidd's first golf course design project in mainland Europe – to widespread acclaim two-and-a-half years ago, Ulrich and his team officially unveiled The Torre Course at the start of this autumn.

The work of Sergio Garcia, also the Spanish legend's first golf course project where he was given overall control, bears all the hallmarks of the 2017 Masters champion and his favourite course Valderrama.

In contrast to The Dunas Course, the par-72 course measures 6,575 metres from the tips and features generous fairways, small greens and places the emphasis on precision and course strategy.

These maybe early days for the course but it is already being tipped to follow its older sibling as one of the 'must-play' new venues in world golf and recently claimed the coveted honour of 'World's Best New Course'.

Ulrich said: "The Torre Course is completely different in nature to The Dunas Course and has been created so that we can provide two outstanding but very different golf experiences that complement each other.

"The feedback that we have received since we first opened the course for play this summer has been amazing, and Sergio Garcia has really outdone himself.

"Torre is a course that rewards precision, it has smaller greens and requires players to think their way around. The more you play it, the more you want to play it again. Our goal is for Torre to set a new benchmark for golf academies in Portugal, with some unique features, such as a nine-hole pitch-and-putt course on the driving range combined with a real championship golf course."

Both The Torre Course and The Dunas Course have been built using the highest sustainable practices by Vanguard and, as Portugal's largest real estate developer, Ulrich is well aware of the responsibility the

company has when it comes to protecting and conserving the environment.

Among the array of measures taken to minimise the environmental impact of the courses and safeguard the natural environment, both courses are maintained using a fleet of the latest hybrid and electric greenkeeping equipment while a carefully selected choice of native plants have been planted to nurture the surrounding wildlife.

In addition, a state-of-the-art computerised watering system supplied by treated domestic and/or industrial wastewater has been implemented which, monitored by a dedicated team of engineers, measures humidity levels around the estate to ensure irrigation only takes place when absolutely necessary.

Terras da Comporta's commitment to the environment extends beyond its golf courses to the other projects that will, in time, be launched in line with its commitment to create the most sustainable golf resort in Europe.

As well as golf, the development will eventually boast a wide range of lifestyle and sporting facilities including tennis, padel, pickleball and horse riding, in addition to real estate, retail outlets, a school and hospital and a number of luxury hotels.

"It has been our aim from the start to create the most sustainable resort in Europe and sustainability sits at the heart of Vanguard's DNA," added Ulrich.

"Our golf courses are designed and operated with a deep respect for the environment. Sustainability guides every decision, from the selection of hybrid and electric maintenance equipment to our ongoing collaboration with GEO for course certification.

"For us, sustainability is not a marketing tool, it is a core principle that defines how we build, maintain and experience the game of golf.

"We'll be announcing the hotel projects very soon, and construction of the first homes is already beginning. The clubhouse is scheduled to be ready within the next two years. What I can say with absolute certainty is that we will keep pushing, raising standards, growing the destination, and always striving to make Terras da Comporta one of the most special places in Europe."

"If what lies ahead in the future is anything like what has been built so far, then we are all in for a real treat." **END**



ENZO LUCIAN

DIRECTOR OF GOLF, ROYAL PALM MARRAKECH



Born in France to a Tunisian mother and Italian father it appears fate might immediately have been signposting Enzo Lucian's path to a life of travel and multi-cultural experiences.

This certainly seems to have been the case with the now 36-year-old subsequently working in Spain, Portugal, Australia, Mauritius, Russia and Luxembourg as well as his native France.

His latest port of call, and potentially his longest, is Africa with Lucian recently named as director of golf at the prestigious and luxurious Fairmont Royal Palm Marrakech, a worldclass.golf destination.

His appointment, his first in such a role after 15 years as a teaching golf professional, came within six months of him obtaining his golf director's Bachelor's Degree and after seeing off around 300 other candidates.

Any justifiable pride he felt quickly gave way to pragmatism as he first honoured a month's worth of lesson commitments before plunging into life at Royal Palm. He had just one day off in the first two months, his choice as he sought to familiarise himself swiftly with the personnel.

Lucian comments: "I have to learn every moment of every day and the most important thing, I think, is the people. But my staff helped me a lot, changing the course and changing the services, and my staff is behind me and I am super proud of this. They were really receptive of what I said to them and they see the result.

"We have a square, that is for sure, but within the square they have complete freedom to let their personality work.

Everyone has a different way to manage, but me, I am totally free and totally relaxed with them, I'm not strict. But the job has to be done and they do it by managing themselves."

Royal Palm's members all have property on site, with their value ranging between around £1.5m (€1.7m) to £3.5m/£4m (€4m/€4.5m). The fact that a rise in green fees from circa £230 to £300 has not seen traffic fall is a testament to the splendour of the course and its setting as well as improvements that have already been implemented under Lucian's watch.

Already vaunted as one of Morocco's, and indeed North Africa's top golfing destinations, he is keen to attract even more guests to a resort whose environment can offer almost guaranteed sunshine as well as low humidity.

Some prospective employers might have been deterred by Lucian's extensive number of jobs and his apparent wanderlust, but he believes his international past was a factor in securing the job – "and also because of my personality," he laughs.

His self-motivation to both integrate himself in unfamiliar cultures and learn new languages will also no doubt have impressed. As well as French he speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese, teaching himself with the use of "dictionaries and Google translate."

He travelled to the other side of the world to work as a barman in Australia to improve his English, but he reveals that he might confine himself to looking no further afield than the scope of Fairmont's extensive portfolio in the future.



"I SAID, 'OKAY, I WANT TO WORK IN THE GOLF INDUSTRY, THAT'S FOR SURE, I KNOW HOW TO PLAY BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH"

"My aim is to stay with Fairmont because it's a beautiful course, a beautiful environment at the hotel, and with Fairmont, if I do a good job, I can maybe move to another Fairmont."

This may be some while off as he adds: "Actually, now my wife said, 'okay, can we please stay here?'"

"My dream in the beginning was to go to Asia, Singapore, which is 13 hours' flight and my wife said, 'I want to stay close to Europe'. It's like two hours from Lyon, two hours from Luxembourg, so it is pretty easy for her to go back to see the family, and also easy for friends to visit us."

He attributes his nomadic professional existence to his parentage, commenting: "My mum is Muslim and my dad is Catholic. I am a mix of both of them and I want to learn how to be multicultural. I never changed jobs because I was fired, I changed because I wanted to do something else."

Lucian rates his experience at the Pesto-vo Golf and Yacht Club, 20 miles north of Moscow, as among his best, adding: "Moscow was a lovely place, believe me, but I was so happy to get to Russia when I turned 30, 31 with my past experiences. Because if I get to Russia when I was 22, 23 I maybe would not have enjoyed it as much."

"I knew how to behave with those kind of people. You're talking about millions of millions of euros, you need to be prepared, you need to behave as a gentleman," he said.

"When you are 22, you are still a kid and even if you have received a good education they don't take you seriously, but when you are 30, 31 and have been a golf pro in different places they start to listen to you."

He and his wife are already enamoured with the Moroccan lifestyle and enjoy wandering Morocco's famous souks. In typical fashion, Lucian quickly taught himself a few Arabic phrases, but recently learned the truth of the saying a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

"I went to the souk with my wife and I started to speak just a little bit of Arabic – hello, how are you – and we liked a plate and I said, 'how much is this?' The guy thought I could speak Arabic and he gave me the prices – and I was completely lost because I didn't learn the numbers yet."

The experience put a smile on his face – but he didn't feel the need to augment it

with some new dentures. "I saw a guy selling teeth, and I said 'what is going on here?' He said, 'do you want a canine or a molar?' and I said, 'no, I've got all the teeth in my mouth thanks, so it's okay'."

"With experiences like that, you have a lot to talk about to people when you have dinner with them, so it's funny."

Lucian has an easy engaging charm and self-deprecating humour, and it is easy to see why he has been so successful in a career that has required him to both put people at ease and be at ease himself, although there is one exception to the latter.

"I'm not shy, I can go and speak to everyone. The only thing I don't like is to speak with a microphone. That I don't like, I don't feel comfortable."

He first swung a club at the age of three and by the time he was 18, with a plus four handicap, he knew he wanted to be a golf professional, "but I was very lucid at that time because I knew inside of me that I didn't have the level to reach the European Tour," he admits.

"I said, 'okay, I want to work in the golf industry, that's for sure, I know how to play but not good enough."

"I didn't want to go travelling to play tournament, tournament, tournament, missed cut, missed cut, missed cut, losing money and then to be frustrated and then to stop playing golf altogether."

He loves playing golf with his 65-year-old father, who has a handicap of one. "Sometimes we make a match, and he wins sometimes. It is funny because we have a lot of pictures, and if someone wins the match they have their arms high and the loser is on the knee. We have a lot of pictures like this and he put together a tableau of pictures."

It is noticeable that working in the UK does not feature on his extensive CV. Might he have been put off by the English food? The English weather?

He chuckles – and gently protests. "I thought to go actually a couple of years ago, but the problem as a golf pro is you need to pass again an equivalence because the certificate to be a golf pro in France is not recognised perfectly, that's why."

Away from golf he is a keen surfer and skier, and he "of course likes football, because I am French and we are going to win the next World Cup – I hope." **END**

ELS CLUB VILAMOURA

ELSCLUBVILAMOURA.COM

Words Aidan Patrick

Location Algarve, Portugal

In the summer of 2025, golfing icon Ernie Els saw his prestigious Els Club brand reach European shores for the very first time, with Vilamoura being the location on the continent deemed worthy of the South African's newest private members club, also now the first private members club in the Algarve.

Perhaps even more significantly, the news that there would be a first European PGA Tour Champions event, the Portugal Invitational, to be held at the Els Club from July 27-2 August 2026 sent a message to the golfing world that there was a larger, globally defined vision quickly becoming a reality in the heart of the Algarve.



For Els, this dream has been in the making for some time, having regularly holidayed in the Algarve over the last decade. "The whole family loves it here. When the kids were small, we would often come down to this area for summer holidays for about 10 years. We'd play some golf in the area, often at Vilamoura," Els added.

The family feel that Els mentions is something which the club itself encapsulates, combining high-end luxury living with the sense of community between members that transcends beyond the golf course.

The connected Victoria Hotel & Spa – set to be in the safe hands of Fairmont in two years – possesses the Els Club's very same identity.

A five-star resort with 260 rooms and suites, the hotel offers facilities for everyone.

Most excitingly for non-members, booking a package stay at the Victoria hotel now provides access to experience the Els Club Vilamoura course for the very first time, a deal which few are going to be able to turn down.

Els recalls: "I actually played the old Victoria Course at Vilamoura here many times. It was an Arnold Palmer course, one of my heroes, so when Arrow Global came, we had a nice chat and they gave us their vision of what the DETAILS team were up to down here with Nuno Sepulveda, so this whole thing started coming together with the people and with my knowledge of the area."





"THE WHOLE TEAM IN THIS PROJECT HAVE TO GET 10 OUT OF 10; IT'S ONE OF THE NICEST PROJECTS WE'VE EVER DONE"

The new Els Club Vilamoura course is located on the same ground as the old Victoria Course, which was best known for hosting the Portugal Masters from 2007–2022, however, its location is where the similarities end.

Naturally, at the heart of the complete redesign and overhaul of the new Els Club course was The Big Easy' himself, working closely alongside leading architect and senior design associate Greg Letsche.

In collaboration with DETAILS, the redevelopment has taken place in just 18 months, an almost unprecedented timescale for a project of this magnitude.

On the new design, Els said: "People might recognise the setting here, but they won't recognise this golf course. It's completely new. Greg and I decided very early on in the process that we were going to reverse the back nine routings and create some new holes.

"That brought with it some logistical challenges, but it was absolutely the right thing to do. The feedback we've had has been overwhelmingly positive. As part of that work, we also created a new practice area, which a golf course of this calibre deserves."

The key for Els was to design the course offering something for golfers of all levels; from the everyday player to an 18 handicap, to a professional player.

The front nine provides ample scoring opportunities, consisting of three par-5s with holes four and seven the only occasions where danger of finding the water becomes realistic threat.

However, with a lot of water being poured on the native areas for growth, high rough and an array of strategically placed bunkers ensure the first half of the course will not be too kind to players who miss the fairways.

The greens of holes six and eight are both encircled by three enticing bunkers and areas of rough on the back side, while no matter what tee you are playing from, the narrow fairway of the par-4 seventh demands perfection to avoid becoming acquainted with the thick shrubbery either side.

In his design, Els has taken the windy conditions into account, especially due to the close proximity of the coast. "Our philosophy is to get the player off the tee into nice wide fairways," he explained.

The back nine most definitely pose an even bigger threat to golfers of all levels, particularly with the drastic rise in water hazards that come into play.

However, with added danger comes some simply stunning scenery; between holes 10 and 15 the course becomes a stout and varied challenge that weaves neatly through its series of water challenges and smattering of native pine without ever feeling too samey.

Hole 10, previously the 18th on the old Victoria course, plays towards the west, with water dominating the right channel and a plethora of pines waiting to meet you on the left.

The 11th hole however is one that Els believes may just be the standout; players will be able to see the water on the right-hand side all the way down to and before the green of the par-5. This can most certainly be reached in three shots if you are able to block out the sea of blue in the periphery of your vision.

Els said: "It looks incredible and strategically I'd say it's got that perfect balance of risk-reward, with water down the left on your tee shot and a stream nestled against the right-hand side of the green complex. Wind also comes into play here. It's a great hole."

The final hole is a tricky dogleg par 4 that plays blind around the corner for the better players. With the clubhouse overlooking as you make the final strides towards the green, the picture of a dramatic championship final day quickly starts to form in your mind.

In terms of projects he has worked on, Els is ultimately extremely proud of what has been delivered. "We've been around the world, let me tell you... it ranks right up there. It's certainly top three and it could be our best.

"The whole team in this project have to get 10 out of 10; it's one of the nicest projects we've ever done."

The Els Club Vilamoura undoubtedly adds another dimension to the golfing tourism landscape in The Algarve.

And with the announcement of the Springs at the Els Club – a new real estate project – this adds to the sense of community, and five-star resort feel that will be brought to a new collection of homes overlooking the golf course. **END**



Words Andy Hiseman
Online st-mellion.co.uk

MIKE BUSH

COURSE MANAGER, ST. MELLION



When you're at the top of your game awards come your way, and for Mike Bush it's been happening for years.

The latest award for the esteemed course manager at St. Mellion Estate in Cornwall came at this year's 59club Global Service Excellence Awards, where Bush was named Superintendent of the Year.

The experienced Cornishman beat golf course superintendents from 22 countries worldwide, short-listed to ten nominees, in 59club's first-ever global awards in front of 300 people at a glittering ceremony at The Belfry Hotel & Resort near Birmingham, England.

Bush's pride and joy, the world-famous Nicklaus Signature Course at St. Mellion, is one of the most breathtaking golf courses in Europe, and like all superintendent nominees Bush and his team went through an intense data-driven assessment period involving mystery shopping and benchmarking.

In the final judging, their presentation of the Nicklaus Signature Course was measured against the world's best golfing experiences in Denmark, Ireland, Australia, Canada, England, the USA, the UAE and Thailand.

St. Mellion achieved an astonishing near-perfect score in the 59club assessment, and Bush accepted the award on behalf of his team. "St. Mellion is in my blood" he said. "I'm a proud Cornishman and actually grew up in the village of St. Mellion, so I feel a deep personal connection with the estate here.

"I'm so proud to receive such a prestigious award, and I am hugely grateful to 59club for this rare accolade, but I see this as much

as a win for my dedicated team and for the glorious St. Mellion landscape which we have cultivated in this corner of Cornwall, as it is a personal accomplishment."

Bush came to St. Mellion in October 1995 after an early career in golf course construction, and subsequently supervised course preparation for a host of professional events on the European Tour and Senior Tour.

He achieved BIGGA Master Greenkeeper status in 2011, one of the first 60 people in history to reach that level. To this day fewer than 100 of Bush's peers worldwide have earned this status.

Bush subsequently expanded his role to become group course manager across the Crown Golf collection.

Jeff Chapman, founder of Crown Golf owners Bangarra Group, said: "The world of international golf is like most global industries in that there is intense competition to be the best, but it does not always recognise the outstanding talents which are making such huge contributions to the success of the sport.

"So it is great news that Mike Bush has received this level of global recognition. As the proud owner of the world famous St. Mellion Estate, I take this opportunity on behalf of all those associated with the resort to congratulate him & say 'thanks for a job well done'".

59club sets industry performance benchmarks and celebrates service excellence across the world, running over 4,000 independent mystery shopper visits annually.

St. Mellion joined 59club in 2022, and Bush won UK & Ireland Superintendent of the



"MIKE'S ACHIEVEMENT IS TESTAMENT TO HIS EXCEPTIONAL STANDARDS, PROFESSIONALISM, AND DEDICATION AT ST. MELLION, WHICH IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING GOLFING DESTINATIONS"

Year Awards in both 2023 and 2024 before receiving the coveted global accolade this year.

"You need a world-class course manager to fully realise the potential of a world-class golf course, and Mike Bush is that man at St. Mellion," said David Moon, director of golf at St. Mellion Estate, pictured opposite with Bush.

"He is our own multi-star Michelin chef of the golf industry, and in The Nicklaus he has his Signature dish."

South West England's most famous golfing attraction was designed with both Tour golf and members' golf in mind by Nicklaus personally, before he won his last Major at The Masters in 1986.

"St Mellion holds a special place in my heart," said Jack Nicklaus, speaking in 2013. "It was my first design opportunity in the UK and among all of the golf courses I have designed I would rank it very high as a test of golf, as a design, and looking at the beauty of each individual hole.

"St Mellion is a strong test of golf, and it gives me a great deal of pride."

St Mellion's Nicklaus Signature Course is best-remembered for hosting the Benson & Hedges International Open for six consecutive years in the early 90s. Anecdotes which highlight the golf course's legendary toughness in full Tour mode are legion.

"I'm not saying it's tight, but I walked down the 12th hole sideways," quipped Zimbabwean Tour pro Tony Johnstone, runner-up to Peter Senior in the B&H in 1992.

One year a visiting Australian Tour golfer ran out of golf balls during his round, forcing him to retire from the event, and in 1992, Jesper Parnevik – on his way to a round in the 80s – played the 18th in under a minute, running all the way and finishing by bombing fully-clothed into the lake beside the final green to the delight of the crowd.

But the beloved Nicklaus golf course, lovingly cared for by Bush and the St Mellion Estate greenkeeping staff, has many thousands of loyal fans who return time and again.

"We're the only European Tour venue for almost 150 miles, and for thirty years golfers have been making a pilgrimage to take on The Nicklaus Signature Course," said Moon.

"The course is so steeped in history. In the summer of 1988 we held an exhibition match to open The Nicklaus course. Jack Nicklaus himself partnered Tom Watson against Nick Faldo and Sandy Lyle, and the Brits won. Now that's what I call a fourball!

"It rained hard that day, like it sometimes does here in Cornwall," said Moon, "but there's always sunshine in the clubhouse at St Mellion. We want your memories of St Mellion to be amazing no matter how you played, so our welcome is truly warm and genuine.

"Luckily, Jack Nicklaus designed his course to be playable for all levels, so we also have some very generous forward tees which make The Nicklaus extremely playable for all standards of golfer."

On Mike Bush's 2025 award, 59club Founder & CEO Simon Wordsworth said: "Mike's achievement is testament to his exceptional standards, professionalism, and dedication at St. Mellion, which is one of the world's leading golfing destinations.

"To be recognised as Global Superintendent of the Year is no small feat: it reflects not just the quality of St. Mellion's playing surfaces and Mike's agronomic capabilities, but also Mike's ability to galvanise his team to deliver exemplary performance day in, day out.

"He is a true leader within the industry, and we are proud to celebrate his success on a global platform."

David Moon finished: "As a colleague Mike consistently helps me to raise my own game and over the last 30 years his high quality standards have been an inspiration to all staff at St. Mellion. With unrelenting commitment and passion he has nurtured not only the world-famous golf course which Jack Nicklaus created for us, but he has also supervised the elevation of our second course, The Kernow – itself a former European Tour venue – to an international standard.

"This magnificent global award is a fine validation of his achievements here. Mike sets a shining example not just for his team here at this resort, but also for his peers in the global golf industry.

"Mike Bush's work is one of the main reasons why St. Mellion is such an extraordinarily rewarding place to visit." **END**

HOW DRONE DATA & AI ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF GREENKEEPING



In recent years, the golf industry has witnessed a quiet revolution. As climate pressures and player expectations rise, greenkeepers are turning to a new ally: technology. Yet, as Stefan Otto, Co-Founder of AerialData, a drone survey specialist in the UK and Europe, is quick to point out, "There's a misconception that technology somehow competes with traditional greenkeeping expertise. In practice, the opposite is true."

Otto's insight reflects a growing consensus among turf professionals. Far from undermining the role of greenkeepers, innovations like drone surveys and artificial intelligence are enhancing their expertise, providing tools that complement intuition with precise data.

"Drone surveys enhance rather than replace the intuition and skill of those who know the course best," Otto emphasises. This synergy is changing not just how courses are managed, but how greenkeeping itself is understood.

The traditional image of the golf course superintendent is one of a reactive problem-solver, responding to issues as they arise, but Otto believes this role is undergoing a fundamental shift.

"The role of the superintendent is evolving from reactive problem-solver to proactive strategist, blending hands-on experience with data-driven insight," he says. "Technology is not replacing expertise; it is elevating it, allowing greenkeepers to anticipate problems before they become visible."

"Often, the data simply confirms what greenkeepers already know — and that's part of its value," Otto notes.

This validation is crucial: when aerial data backs up on-the-ground observations, it builds trust and helps teams embrace the new details the data reveals, such as subtler variations or early stress indicators that might not be visible from the ground.

As Otto puts it: "That validation builds trust in the process, helping teams take on board the new details the data reveals."

"The best results come when aerial data and ground knowledge work in tandem: verifying patterns, refining treatments, and tracking recovery," Otto explains.

In this way, drone surveys are becoming an essential part of the superintendent's toolkit, alongside moisture meters, irrigation logs, and visual inspection. The combination allows teams to refine treatments and track recovery with a level of precision that was previously impossible.

The next phase of technological development is already on the horizon. Artificial intelligence is set to automate issue detection, making the process even more efficient.

"The next phase of development will integrate artificial intelligence to automate issue detection," Otto shares. "AI models trained on thousands of survey images can already flag potential turf disease, irrigation anomalies, and stress patterns automatically. And crucially, these systems improve continuously as they learn from each interaction with course staff."

"Combined with regular drone flights, this creates a living record of turf health across the season," Otto says. This living record enables a level of monitoring and analysis that was previously unimaginable.





"AS AI AND DRONES BECOME MORE WIDELY ADOPTED, THE MOST SUCCESSFUL COURSES WILL BE THOSE THAT FOSTER A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY"

For multi-course operators and resort groups, the benefits are even greater as Otto explains: "It also enables comparative benchmarking: understanding which courses or zones perform best under similar conditions, and why."

This approach not only improves turf health but also fosters a more accountable and transparent maintenance culture.

One of the most compelling advantages of integrating technology into greenkeeping is the ability to benchmark performance across courses.

"For multi-course operators and resort groups, it also enables comparative benchmarking: understanding which courses or zones perform best under similar conditions, and why," Otto reiterates.

This kind of analysis supports smarter, more accountable decision-making, helping organisations allocate resources more effectively and justify investments in sustainability measures.

"The result is not just healthier turf, but a smarter, more accountable maintenance culture," Otto summarises. "By tracking outcomes and understanding the impact of every decision, greenkeepers can continually refine their practices for maximum effect."

As climate change intensifies and water becomes an ever-scarcer resource, sustainability is moving to the forefront of greenkeeping strategy, and technology provides the foundation for this shift.

"With data as the new foundation of greenkeeping, the courses that can see stress before it happens will be the ones that thrive in the changing climate," Otto asserts. "Regular data collection enables teams to spot trends, understand how their decisions affect resource use, and adapt to changing conditions in real time."

"The greatest gains come from tracking turf health over time — understanding how each decision influences sustainability, resource use, and course performance," Otto adds. "Over the course of a season, or even several years, this longitudinal approach reveals patterns invisible to the naked eye."

"It allows greenkeepers to make informed choices that protect both the quality of the playing surface and the wider environment."

Despite the increasing sophistication of technology, Otto is adamant that the

human element remains central. "In the end, it's not about replacing intuition, but giving greenkeepers a clearer view of the challenges ahead — and the tools to respond with confidence," he says. "The best technology serves as an extension of the greenkeeper's expertise, not a substitute for it."

This perspective is supported by the everyday experiences of greenkeeping teams. Data from drone surveys often confirms what experienced professionals already suspect, lending weight to their observations and helping to secure buy-in for new approaches.

At the same time, aerial surveys can pick up subtle changes that might go unnoticed at ground level, enabling earlier interventions and reducing the risk of long-term damage.

Looking to the future, Otto sees even greater integration of technology and greenkeeping knowledge. "As AI and drones become more widely adopted, the most successful courses will be those that foster a culture of collaboration between people and technology," he predicts. "This means investing in training, encouraging open communication, and recognising that the best solutions often come from combining human insight with machine precision."

In Otto's view, the key to success lies in continuous improvement. Regularly reviewing data, soliciting feedback from staff, and staying open to new ideas ensures that courses remain at the cutting edge of sustainable management.

"The courses that adapt quickest will be the ones that set the standard for the industry," Otto concludes.

As golf courses across the UK and Europe embrace the potential of drone technology and artificial intelligence, a new era of greenkeeping is dawning. The combination of hands-on expertise and data-driven insight is transforming course management, delivering healthier turf, greater sustainability, and a more accountable maintenance culture.

As Otto puts it: "It's about empowering greenkeepers with the tools and information they need to make the best decisions — for their courses, their teams, and the environment." With technology in the toolbox, the future of greenkeeping looks brighter than ever. **END**



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"MOST OF OUR BEST IDEAS BEGAN AS CONVERSATIONS WITH CLUBS
FACING REAL, EVERYDAY CHALLENGES"



Words

Elias Knudsen
Co-Founder
How Many Strokes

GUEST BOOK

ELIAS KNUDSEN



Working alongside Tonny – our founder – has taught me the value of listening well and following through. If we do our job well, our technology feels effortless: most importantly for the players, but almost just as important for the golf operations team so they can focus on chasing excellent service and great experiences. That's the standard we work towards at How Many Strokes – Connecting Club and Players.

Most of our best ideas began as conversations with clubs facing real, everyday challenges. The San Roque Club wanted members and guests to see daily green speed; that shaped our live course-update module across the Digital Information Board and Club App. Whistling Straits needed a clear way to brief large corporate groups; the News Box was born. Costa Navarino asked for a streamlined, digital approach to legal acknowledgements; that became the backbone of our Online Rental Manager. And Vilamoura Golf nudged us towards a Digital Lost & Found – because reuniting players with kit shouldn't require detective work.

We truly love receiving these kinds of insights, not only from our clients but also from clubs that are not yet working with us. Every idea helps us move forward in creating smarter, more meaningful solutions for the golf world.

Tell us what "better" looks like at your course, and we'll help you get there. **END**

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