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“TRUMP IS NO DOUBT PUTTING PRESSURE ON BRITISH PRIME MINISTER SIR KEIR STARMER TO DO LIKEWISE TO THE R&A, BUT THE LATTER SHOULD STAND FIRM AND RESIST”

## FAIR COMMENT

Cards on the table: I love Turnberry. It's one of my favourites. It's also widely regarded as a great course — and rightly so. Personally, I think it's the best on the Open Championship rota. But here's the rub: in the current climate there is no way that Turnberry should be back on that rota, and, certainly, not as soon as 2028.

Whatever your political hue, what can not be denied is that anything with Donald Trump connections is currently toxic to some degree.

Having just about survived the LIV Golf breakaway — an internal struggle — the last thing the sport needs is to be the world focus for political protests and to be tarnished in any way with an orange brush.

Trump would want to attend. His ego would demand it. And given his Presidency does not end until January 2029, the security implications for his attendance at a Turnberry Open in 2028 would certainly place an unacceptable burden on the British taxpayer. One only has to see the reaction of the British public to a recent visit from his Vice-President, JD Vance, to imagine how vitriolic the atmosphere would be for Trump's attendance at an Open.

The R&A is making a great play of 'logistical issues' as the main barrier preventing Turnberry returning to the rota, but I doubt the expense of rectifying that would bother the Trump Organization. The clear issue here is Trump himself. I agree with Mark Darbon's predecessor as R&A chief executive, Martin Slumbers, who had said previously that Turnberry would not be reconsidered until the focus was on the golf itself and not the golf club's controversial owner...



### Words

Michael Lenihan  
Publisher

**READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE**  
[golfmanagement.online/comment/152](https://golfmanagement.online/comment/152)



# FEATURING

## AUTUMN 2025

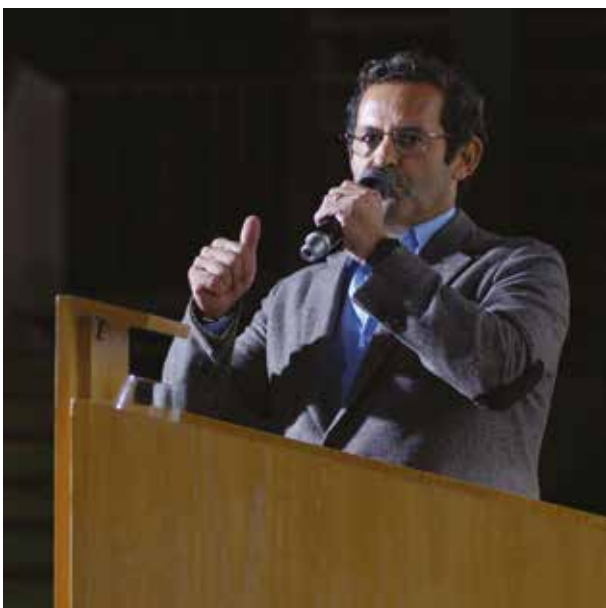


## FERNANDO PARÓN PÉREZ

### LA HACIENDA LINKS

"The opening of the new halfway house on the Links course represented a significant enhancement to the overall player experience at La Hacienda Links. It's about offering members and visitors the opportunity to pause during their round."

22



## PEDRO CASTELO BRANCO

### ROYAL ÓBIDOS

"As it turned out, the timing to join Royal Óbidos was fantastic. We received a good wave of golfers after Covid with golf participation booming across Europe. This part of the world quickly became the great golf destination you know it as now."

26



## STEVE SLINGER

### HAYLING GOLF CLUB

"I always wanted to manage a links. I played Hayling about 30-odd years ago in a county match and loved it then. I always thought to myself if the timing was right, if everything aligned, I'd be very interested in this role."

30



## SA NATHAN

### SAUJANA GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

"One of the challenges that we face here, I think not only in Saujana or Malaysia, is the etiquette part of it, getting the members to replace the divots, repair pitch marks and rake the bunkers."

34



## ANDY BOURKE

### CLUB CAR

"If you were a keen golfer and wanted to improve that element everything was there. I didn't really improve my game, but there were plenty of modules on the business of golf, about finance and management and learning about strategy."

42

“WE HAVE A FANTASTIC TEAM WHO ARE WELL-VERSED IN EVENTS OF THIS SCALE, SO EACH RYDER CUP IS LIKE A WELL-OILED MACHINE. THAT’S WHY THE RYDER CUP CONTINUES TO TRUST US”



## COVER STORY

CLUBCAR.COM



There aren't too many brands that can boast three decades of commercial association with one global sporting event.

Club Car, the world's leading manufacturer of small-wheel electric vehicles, has supported the Ryder Cup since 1995, its iconic red and blue team cars becoming synonymous with golf's greatest team contest.

As the golfing world prepares to descend on Bethpage Black Course, New York this September, Club Car Vice President EMEA Marco Natale expands on the importance of the partnership.

"Club Car hasn't just been a supplier of the Ryder Cup, we have become an integral part of its DNA," explained Natale.

"The event has changed beyond recognition since the 1990s when Club Car was first involved. It has transformed into one of the world's greatest sporting spectacles, and Club Car has grown alongside it.

"Club Car has been an innovator since it was formed in the 1960s, and that desire to be a pioneer and lead the industry has aligned perfectly with the Ryder Cup.

"Indeed in 1997 – the year of Club Car's first European Ryder Cup – 95 per cent of golf carts ran on petrol," continued Natale.

"However, the owner of host venue Valderrama, Jaime Ortíz-Patiño, was ahead of his time on sustainability, and Club Car worked with him to ensure the vast majority of the event fleet was electric.

"More recently, we introduced solar power in the buggy compound at the 2023 Ryder Cup in Rome to provide power for the event fleet."

While the red and blue team cars are often in the spotlight, whisking the captains and vice-captains around the course, behind the scenes hundreds more Club Car vehicles help the staging and delivery of the event.

Over three decades, Club Car has provided logistical precision and operational efficiency time and again, and has supplied team cars, support vehicles and staging fleets for the last 16 editions of the Ryder Cup.

"When you are integral to an event of this size, involving tens of thousands of spectators a day over a site of more than 500 acres, which is broadcast live in hundreds of countries, the reliability of those vehicles is essential," Natale states.

"We have a fantastic team who are well-versed in events of this scale, so each Ryder Cup is like a well-oiled machine. That's why the Ryder Cup continues to trust us.

"And at Bethpage, we are incredibly proud to continue to support the game of golf – as we have done for many decades – not only as a Worldwide Supplier to the Ryder Cup this year, but also in 2027 when the event is staged at Adare Manor in Ireland."

"We are also an Official Supplier to the DP World Tour; PGA of America; PGA of UK and Ireland and St Andrews Links Trust." **END**



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"IF IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR RONNIE CORBETT AND BRUCE FORSYTH,  
THEN WHO WAS I TO ARGUE?"



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## GOLF, AND MY WORKING-CLASS ROOTS

I was recently asked 'how did you get into golf?'. And it got me thinking. In the early 1970s, golf was not a natural pathway for a lad from a two-up, two-down, working-class home in one of the more working-class areas of Portsmouth. And so it proved. I don't recall picking up a golf club until I was in my 20s but that wasn't the beginning of it. Like many young boys of my time, I was obsessed by sport... all sport. We had no games consoles, so we'd do radical things, like go out and play sport; or go to a local sports club and watch it. Or at weekends, we'd watch *Grandstand* and *World of Sport* on TV – on a black-and-white set, naturally – to see what sports took our fancy.

By the age of eight, I was already watching football regularly at my local Football League club, but I was too young to travel to away games, so, on alternate Saturdays, I'd enjoy a diet of rally-cross, scrambling, ice hockey, rugby league, boxing, and snooker. I'd already decided I had no interest in horse-racing or wrestling. In the summer, we also enjoyed athletics, bowls, tennis, and, of course, golf. I watched them avidly and each grabbed me in a different way.

I wasn't a petrol-head, so, while I enjoyed watching motorsport on the box, I never took it up or went along to see it. Rugby league was a northern sport; I had no idea where the nearest ice hockey rink was and skating looked too hard, anyway – it was! I tried boxing, but every time I got hit on the nose I'd break out into a fit of sneezing. I did enjoy snooker; I played tennis at school and took up bowls in my late teens.

I wasn't at all athletic, but I enjoyed watching people who were. And I didn't wear garish clothing, or go for long walks, but if it was good enough for Ronnie Corbett and Bruce Forsyth, then who was I to argue?

Back in those days the Open Championship was live on the BBC so everybody could watch it, and there were TV shows like *International Pro-Celebrity Golf* and *Around with Alliss*, where the legend of the mic would play a round with a celeb on a glorious course, while trying to be Michael Parkinson. It was wonderful, and I knew then that I loved golf. Comedians played it – it must be fun. I watched it whenever I could, but it seemed a dream too far that I would ever play it even just socially. It wasn't for the likes of me.

Thankfully, the route to enjoying golf IRL – as the youngsters say – is now much easier for a working-class kid, though the introduction to the sport is more likely to be via a games console than a modern-day Lee Trevino quipping on terrestrial TV.

A friend of mine told me about his son, who was enjoying some sort of weird space-based golf game on his Xbox: "He turned to me and said, 'this is really good fun. They should do something like this for real!'" **END**



# NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



## DAVIDSON JOINS CONSULTIV UTILITIES TO SPEARHEAD NEW GOLF DIVISION

Consultiv Utilities, one of the leading utility procurement specialists and energy consultancies, has announced the appointment of Paul Davidson as business development manager with immediate effect. Davidson, who has built a solid and credible reputation within the golf industry over the past two years, has taken the opportunity to join Craig Portsmouth – the senior procurement analyst at Consultiv Utilities – and energy analyst, Linzi Dudley, to spearhead a drive for increased golf business.

**SEARCH 'CONSULTIV UTILITIES' ONLINE**  
at [golfmanagement.online](http://golfmanagement.online) for the full story



## ELEVATE GOLF CHAMPIONS WOMEN IN THE GOLF INDUSTRY

Golf tourism's newest showpiece, Elevate Golf, will join forces with the Links Network this October for a special networking event celebrating the achievements of women across the golf industry. More than 120 women will come together for an event designed to foster conversation and connection across all sectors of the golf industry. The day will feature a panel discussion led by Sky Sports presenter and Elevate ambassador Di Stewart, exploring the evolving role of women in golf – from leadership and representation to access, opportunity and equity – while celebrating the achievements of those driving meaningful change.

**SEARCH 'ELEVATE GOLF' ONLINE**  
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## PULA GOLF RESORT TO HOST EUROPEAN SENIOR LADIES' TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Pula Golf Resort will make history next month when the prestigious European Senior Ladies' Team Championship heads to the Mallorca resort for the first time. The leading amateur event, open to women over 50 and organised by the European Golf Association, has been played annually since 2006 and take place at Pula from September 2-6. Held over five days, the competition's format is comprised of two rounds of stroke play followed by three days of match play; the top eight teams (each made up of six of the nation's best senior female amateurs) from stroke play will advance to 'Flight A' to contend for medals.

### **SEARCH 'PULA GOLF RESORT' ONLINE**

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



## CABOT HIGHLANDS CELEBRATES 400 YEARS OF CASTLE STUART WITH OFFICIAL TARTAN

In celebration of the 400th anniversary of the historic Castle Stuart, Cabot Highlands is proudly unveiling the official Cabot Highlands Tartan, a bespoke design that commemorates centuries of Highland heritage and marks a bold new chapter with its brand-new golf course, Old Petty, now open for preview play. Perched along the Moray Firth, Castle Stuart was completed in 1625 by James Stuart, 1st Earl of Moray. Once a symbol of forgotten grandeur, the castle now stands as the centrepiece of Cabot Highlands, where tradition meets innovation and history is woven into every experience.

### **SEARCH 'CABOT HIGHLANDS' ONLINE**

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



## DETAILS EXPANDS GOLF AND HOTEL PORTFOLIO WITH TRÓIA RESORT

Details — Hospitality, Sports, Leisure — has extended its portfolio of golf courses and resorts in Portugal with the addition of Tróia Resort. The popular golf and lifestyle resort has become the tenth golf venue to be managed by Details, joining the likes of \*Vilamoura Golf, PGA Aroeira Lisboa, Palmares Ocean Living & Golf, and Vale Pisão operated by Portugal's largest golf management company.

### **SEARCH 'TRÓIA' ONLINE**

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## APHRODITE HILLS RESORT LAUNCHES FIRST TRACKMAN RANGE IN CYPRUS

Aphrodite Hills Resort — a worldclass.golf destination — has taken its reputation for sporting excellence in Cyprus to a new level with the launch of the country's first-ever Trackman Range — a state-of-the-art golf practice facility that combines entertainment, innovation and performance like never before. The landmark addition marks the latest phase of the resort's multi-million Euro investment programme and reinforces its position among Europe's premium sports destination.

**SEARCH 'APHRODITE HILLS' ONLINE**  
at [golfmanagement.online](http://golfmanagement.online) for the full story



## LA HACIENDA LINKS BLAZES SUSTAINABLE TRAIL FOR EUROPEAN GOLF RESORTS

La Hacienda Links Golf Resort is at the forefront of Spanish golf's drive to preserve the environment after implementing a wide-reaching programme of initiatives to boost the resort's sustainable credentials and reduce its eco-footprint. Aligned with its long-term commitment to sustainability, the 36-hole resort in the Costa del Sol has invested across its golf facilities in solutions designed to tackle the most important green issues faced by global golf venues, with upgrades including a major overhaul of its water and energy consumption which has helped to reduce its water usage by 20 per cent.

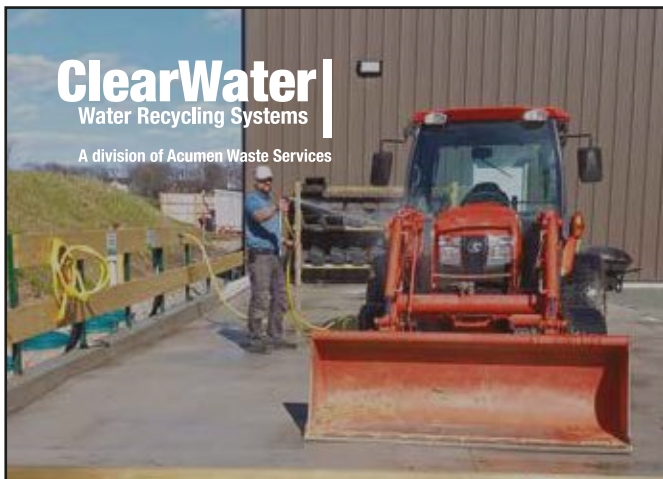
**SEARCH 'LA HACIENDA' ONLINE**  
at [golfmanagement.online](http://golfmanagement.online) for the full story



## MURRAYSHALL REAPS THE REWARDS OF ROBOTIC MOWER INVESTMENT

Murrayshall, the highly rated Country Estate a short drive from Perth, has reaped the rewards of an investment in a fleet of Husqvarna robotic mowers to support the greenkeeping team and further elevate the overall definition of its US parkland-style layout. Introduced as part of a six-figure deal with Murrayshall owners Stellar Asset Management, the state-of-the-art robots are programmed to cut the rough, fairways and green surrounds three times-a-week to deliver a more consistent length of cut and generate a stronger and healthier grass plant for year-round playability.

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## QHOTELS COLLECTION APPOINTS ROSS BRANNAN AS HEAD OF GOLF

The QHotels Collection is proud to announce the appointment of Ross Brannan as Head of Golf and Greenkeeping at Glasgow Westerwood Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort. Brannan brings a decade of greenkeeping experience to the role, alongside a clear passion for course development and guest experience. This strategic promotion reflects The QHotels Collection's ongoing investment in developing home-grown talent and creating clear pathways for career progression within the group.

### SEARCH 'ROSS BRANNAN' ONLINE

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



## CLEARWATER WASH RECYCLING SYSTEMS TO EXHIBIT AT GROUNDSFEST 2025

ClearWater, a self-sustainable, closed-loop wash water recycling unit designed to meet the rigorous demands of grounds maintenance operations, has announced that they will be exhibiting at GroundsFest 2025, September 9-10. GroundsFest is the largest, annual, free must-attend event for grounds staff, greenkeepers, landscapers, designers and architects, gardeners, local authorities, estate managers and contractors.

### SEARCH 'CLEARWATER' ONLINE

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



## MENA TURF SHOW IN DUBAI TO BRING TURF INNOVATION TO THE DESERT

The turf industry is set to converge in the Middle East as The MENA TURF SHOW launches on April 17, 2026 at the prestigious Park Hyatt Dubai. Supported by VIYA GOLF, and as the region's first dedicated event for golf, sports turf, and landscaping innovation, the show will provide a vital platform for professionals to connect, discover new technologies, and share expertise. From golf course superintendents to sports venue managers and golf course architects, THE MENA TURF SHOW promises insights and solutions tailored to the unique challenges of the Middle East's climate.

### SEARCH 'MENA TURF SHOW' ONLINE

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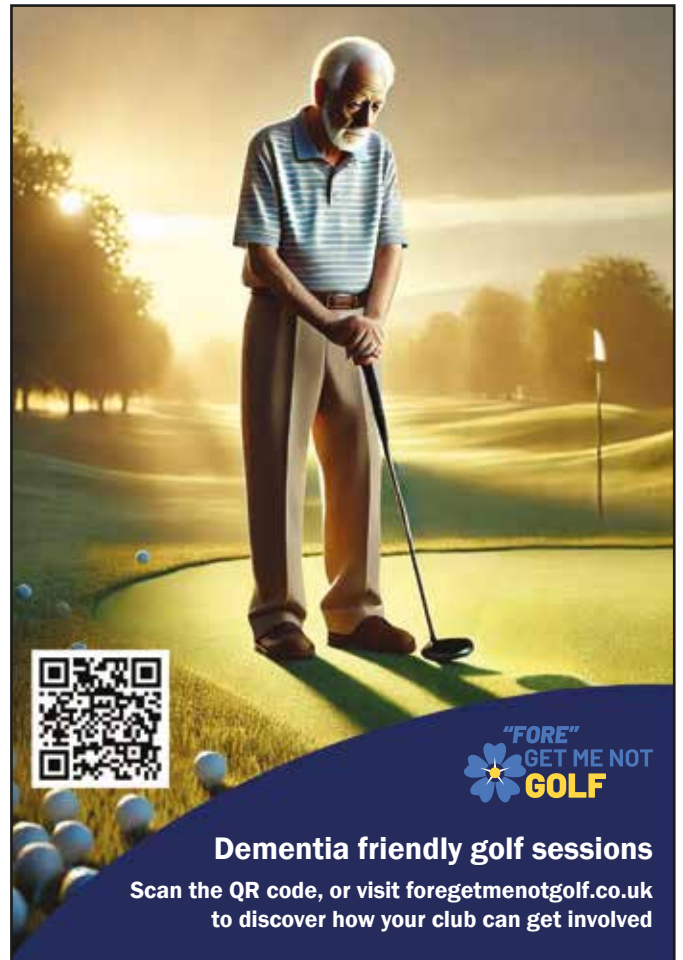
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## TRUMP INTERNATIONAL SCOTLAND OPENS NEW SECOND COURSE

A new era of championship golf has begun in Scotland with the official opening of The New Course at Trump International Golf Links, Scotland — a course already being hailed as a modern masterpiece and a defining moment in the evolution of global golf destinations. Opened on July 29, 2025 by President Donald J. Trump, the New Course is crafted through some of the most dramatic and awe-inspiring coastal dunes in the world, delivering a breathtaking fusion of nature, design strategy and raw beauty.

**SEARCH 'TRUMP INTERNATIONAL' ONLINE**  
at [golfmanagement.online](https://golfmanagement.online) for the full story



## RESERVOIR PAVES WAY FOR GREENER FUTURE AT HAREWOOD DOWNS

Harewood Downs Golf Club is preparing to install a trio of water storage reservoirs on its grounds in a major step towards taking even greater environmental responsibility. The plans, which were approved by Buckinghamshire Council this spring with construction scheduled to start in April 2026, will see drainage water from around the venue collected in the reservoirs before being recycled and used to maintain the course's greens, tees, approaches and eventually fairways.

**SEARCH 'HAREWOOD DOWNS' ONLINE**  
at [golfmanagement.online](https://golfmanagement.online) for the full story



## INVESTMENT AT THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ENHANCES COURSE CONDITIONING

The Buckinghamshire is investing £3 million to upgrade its major championship qualifying course and enhance year-round playing conditions. The private members' club, home to the Ladies European Tour and which has previously hosted qualifying for The Open and US Women's Open, completed a renovation of all its 68 rivetted bunkers this spring. The Club is now adding more than 100,000 linear metres of piped and secondary drainage, and looking to increase its water capture capabilities.

**SEARCH 'THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE' ONLINE**  
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# NEW DESTINATION

## WORLDCLASS.GOLF



Saadiyat Beach Golf Club in Abu Dhabi has become the latest destination to join worldclass.golf – a portfolio of the world’s premier golf courses, destinations and resorts.

Set against the backdrop of Saadiyat Island’s white-sand shoreline, the course is defined not only by its views but by its deep respect for the surrounding environment.

A strong emphasis on sustainability has shaped its eco-conscious landscape, allowing the native flora to thrive while preserving the island’s delicate ecosystem.

Saadiyat Beach Golf Club is a sanctuary not just for golfers, but also for local wildlife. It’s common to spot graceful gazelles moving quietly across the fairways or rare migratory birds taking refuge along the water’s edge – small but powerful reminders of nature’s presence at every turn.

The newly redeveloped course delivers a world-class experience that feels immersive and inspiring. While each hole poses its own challenge, the ever-changing coastal winds and natural elements ensure no two rounds are the same.

Following a recent site visit to assess the resorts viability for membership, CEO of worldclass.golf, Michael Lenihan said: “I last visited Saadiyat Beach in 2016, and the number of improvements in that time, on and off the golf course, are hugely impressive.

“Credit must go to Viya Golf and club manager Karl Whitehead for enhancing the visitor experience, which is what the portfolio is all about – validating the quality of the customer experience across all of the touch points, and not just the quality, and design of the golf course.” **END**



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# FERNANDO PADRÓN PÉREZ

## DIRECTOR OF GOLF, LA HACIENDA LINKS



When it comes to rapid rises, few venues in European golf can keep pace with La Hacienda Links Golf Resort.

The 36-hole Costa del Sol gem has upgraded both of its championship courses, unveiled an award-winning halfway house, opened a new clubhouse and added the five-star Fairmont La Hacienda hotel – to name but a few highlights – within the last half-decade alone.

There is perhaps nobody better placed to talk about this meteoric ascent than director of golf Fernando Padrón Pérez, who has now served two-and-a-half years at the helm of the La Hacienda ship. His journey to the position has been an eventful one, to put it mildly.

"I started my professional career 15 years ago running Salamanca Forum Resort, a 27-hole golf course with a five-star hotel and residential development," said Padrón.

"After four years, I joined Real Club Valderrama as operations manager – and at Valderrama, service excellence is paramount. I learned how to run a private golf club and how to reach the highest levels of course maintenance and customer service. I also had the privilege of being involved in organising DP World Tour events.

"In 2019 I became part of an international project, managing PGA Riviera Maya in Mexico, where there are two amazing courses designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. I was very proud to secure a long-term agreement with PGA of America.

"After some wonderful years in the Caribbean, I joined the new La Hacienda project two and a half years ago."

La Hacienda Links has a well-earned reputation for high standards and boundless ambition, so it says a lot about Padrón's standing in the industry that the club's owners identified a manager who – at the time – lived halfway across the world as their ideal candidate.

He explained: "When I was in Mexico, I received a call from the owners of La Hacienda to explain the new project they were developing, and I found it very interesting. I also knew the Sotogrande area very well, which made the possibility of returning home to Spain even more appealing.

"The decision was not easy, as I was truly happy and excited about my work in Mexico. In the end, I decided to join La Hacienda... and I can now say it was the right choice!"

Indeed, Padrón was named Manager of the Year for 2025 by Club Manager Education – and with the incredible strides taken by his resort since he was appointed, the Spaniard would have been hard to overlook.

"I was incredibly happy and grateful to receive the award," he said. "What makes this particular honour especially meaningful is that it comes from my colleagues in the profession. To be recognised by those who share the same challenges, responsibilities and passion for our work is a privilege that fills me with pride.

"For me, this award is not only a personal recognition, but also a celebration of more than 15 years dedicated to the management of golf clubs.

"While I know that many other directors are equally deserving, I humbly accepted the award as a reflection of my unwaver-





## “WE ARE WELCOMING A GROWING NUMBER OF VISITORS FROM EMERGING MARKETS SUCH AS NORTH AMERICA AND ASIA”

ing commitment to continuous education – which led me to obtain the international CCM certification – as well as my international experience and the versatility I have gained through managing both members’ and commercial clubs.

“When you receive an award like this one, it inspires you to continue learning, growing and contributing to our profession with even greater dedication.”

Of course, even the most astute of golf managers can only do so much unless the course (or courses) itself are of exceptional quality. Padrón oversees two layouts that were already well-received, but have undeniably been elevated in recent years.

First came American architect Kurtis Bowman’s overhaul of the eponymous Links course, widely recognised as one of the best coastal layouts in mainland Europe.

“Since the pandemic, golf has been growing steadily, with more and more people taking up the sport – something that has had a very positive impact on golf clubs, including ours. We are seeing increasing numbers of women and young people playing golf, and demand for memberships at social clubs continues to rise.

“Golf tourism is also expanding, and at La Hacienda we are welcoming a growing number of visitors from emerging markets such as North America and Asia.

“Looking ahead, one of the key challenges for golf course managers will be to ensure an appropriate pace of play, which will certainly demand our close attention in the coming years.”

A refurbishment of the Heathland course followed last year, enhancing Dave Thomas’ layout with significant layout changes and landscaping work. The objective was simple: bring the Heathland up to match the high standards set across the rest of the resort, which by that time had opened an array of new facilities and was attracting more attention than ever. If people viewed the Heathland as second-fiddle before, they certainly couldn’t make that claim now.

To Padrón, though, what happens off the fairways at a top golf resort is just as important as what happens on them. One example in particular stands out, not least because it was named the best of its ilk in the world just last year.

He said: “The opening of the new halfway house on the Links course represented

a significant enhancement to the overall player experience at La Hacienda Links. It’s about offering members and visitors the opportunity to pause during their round and enjoy these stunning views of the Mediterranean Sea, Gibraltar and Africa that we’re so lucky to have – and of course to savour some light refreshments! It could have just been a facility, but instead it’s turned into a highlight of the course.”

Like any forward-thinking golf manager, though, Padrón knows that any and all investment cannot be planned with quality and affordability as the only metrics. Instead, every decision taken must be informed by one of the words that has defined the golf industry for much of the 21st century: sustainability.

La Hacienda Links wants to be a leader in the field, rather than an imitator, and changes geared towards environmental responsibility have been constant at the resort even before Padrón’s tenure.

“We are firmly committed to sustainability and the protection of the environment – these values guide so many of the decisions we make.

“From introducing Bermuda grass on our greens to ensure more efficient use of irrigation water, to eliminating single use plastic bottles and replacing them with water stations, every step is designed to minimize our environment impact. In addition, we are actively working towards achieving GEO certification.”

You’d be forgiven for thinking that there were few stones left to turn in the quest to keep improving La Hacienda Links – and keep up with the incredible reputations and histories boasted by many of Europe’s other top golf resorts – but there are no signs that anyone at the resort is resting on their laurels.

Padrón added: “At La Hacienda, our constant priority is to keep improving so that we can offer our guests the very best experience. Looking ahead, we are planning significant enhancements to the Heathland course, including upgraded cart paths, re-fined bunkers, and the redesign of selected holes to elevate playability and enjoyment.

“And with the opening of the Fairmont hotel on the horizon, we believe it will be the crowning touch – the element that will truly complete and enrich the La Hacienda experience.” **END**





**Words** Dan Blank  
**Online** royalobidos.com

# PEDRO CASTELO BRANCO

## GOLF DIRECTOR, ROYAL ÓBIDOS



ROYAL ÓBIDOS  
GOLF RESORT  
★★★★★

In 2021 – by all accounts, not your standard year in the world of golf (or anything else for that matter) – Pedro Castelo Branco took over the reigns as golf director at Royal Óbidos Spa & Golf Resort.

Situated on Portugal's stunning Silver Coast, the resort was already a HotelPlanner Tour Portuguese Open host the year before his arrival and a popular retreat for those looking to discover this incredible part of the world.

As a Lisbon native who worked within the golf industry from the outset of his career – starting his journey as a course marshal at Montado Hotel & Golf Resort more than two decades ago – you would be forgiven for assuming that he arrived from a similar role at another venue.

But the move to Royal Óbidos was far from an obvious one. In fact, the job was the first time in 14 years that Castelo Branco had worked at a golf club. His move away from the industry in 2007 came following director of golf roles with The Onyria Group, Montado Hotel & Golf Resort and Ribagolfe.

"I was always in golf, always – and then I left. I left for a completely different project," Castelo explained from his office in the club's breathtaking Atlantic Ocean-facing clubhouse.

"I set up my own media company, creating and producing content, and provided the press office for the Portuguese Golf Federation. The coronavirus pandemic, however, made things very difficult for us.

"Suddenly there were no events, which meant nothing to write about, which meant I didn't have a business."

It was during this time that a conversation with the general manager at Royal Óbidos changed Castelo Branco's plans.

He remembered: "In 2021, I was invited by the general manager here to replace the golf director that was leaving... and I felt immediately that it was the perfect time for me to return to golf.

"It was not easy at the time because we were just getting out of the pandemic. As an individual entrepreneur, things were not very easy at all. Those circumstances were what triggered my return. I've always liked this: the back office of golf, planning tournaments, preparing the course, the setup, everything. I've always enjoyed it."

"As it turned out, the timing to join Royal Óbidos was fantastic. We received a good wave of golfers after Covid with golf participation booming across Europe. This part of the world quickly became the great golf destination you know it as now."

Castelo Branco has been pivotal in enhancing the golf experience at the venue – home to a par-72 course which has been consistently ranked among Portugal's best since first opening in 2012.

The layout was, in fact, the last ever designed by the late, great Seve Ballesteros (who tested out every hole before he passed away but sadly never played an official round).

But Castelo Branco's work has involved far more than golf course management. The 52-year-old has been crucial in pushing and marketing the region as a golfing and cultural destination thanks to the formation of a close working relationship with neighbouring



# "WE WILL BE BACK WITH A BIG TOURNAMENT – MAYBE NOT IN 2026 BUT DEFINITELY FOR 2027"

resorts Praia D'El Rey, West Cliffs and Bom Sucesso on Portugal's Silver Coast.

According to Castelo Branco: "When I arrived here, the packages were already working, but the main package was focused heavily on Praia D'El Rey and the Marriott (hotel).

"I've known Francisco Cadete (then golf director at Praia D'El Rey and West Cliffs) for years, so it was easy when I arrived to sit with him and work out what the strategy was, and what we could do that was beneficial – not only to Royal Obidos, but also beneficial in attracting more golfers to the region.

"Then it made complete sense for Bom Sucesso to join, as they have everything to gain from this partnership."

Situated within a 10km radius of each other, the region the four resorts share is famed for its rugged coastline, sandy beaches and ancient towns. The moderate temperatures all-year round make it the ideal golf destination.

Through working more closely together, the resorts now allow visitors to select which courses they wish to play during their stay at the two five-star hotels, villa or apartment accommodation, while complimentary transfers are organised between the resorts.

Castelo Branco said: "All the golf directors at the three venues get along quite well, so it was easy to create the package after I arrived: to agree on the transfers, pricing, how we sell... it was a very simple process, and I think it really helped make us a destination that we are now.

"As a region and a destination, we are getting more and more people every year, more rounds are being booked. It's very important to keep this trajectory going for bookings and to continue to work with each other."

When most golfers think of Portugal, they traditionally think of a much more southerly region. Castelo Branco believes that that perception is overdue a change. "I've always said when comparing this Silver Coast area and the Lisbon area to the Algarve, there is only a slight drop off in temperature but we've still got great golf courses, nice gastronomy, restaurants, hotels... everything!

"The only thing a golfer may complain about here is the lack of nightlife – so that also can sometimes bring a different type of golfer here.

"But we still get groups who are looking for that sort of break – they come here and spend one week playing often, and after they finish the round they have a drink but then they go to the swimming pool or to the spa or to the beach. There's lots of other stuff to do during the day, visiting Óbidos or Peniche, and then you can rest and then play golf again bright and early."

This September, the venue will once again host the HotelPlanner Tour – a highlight in the calendar for all associated with the club.

"Hosting professional events like this really helps us, not only commercially but it helps everyone here," said Castelo Branco.

"It helps the staff, especially the green-keeping team because you know that every year, by that time, the course has to be in its top, top condition. Tournament hosting also helps a lot in the planning of the year for golf work, like course improvement plans."

This year will, however, be the last time that the tournament is hosted at the course.

Castelo Branco explained: "This will be the third year of the second contract. It will not be renewed, but we are all pleased with what we have achieved over the last six years.

"Hosting these tournaments is very important. I think the administration has understood that too. So, we want to host another big event, whether that is a Ladies European Tour event or another. That's the strategy. We will be back with a big tournament – maybe not in 2026 but definitely for 2027."

When he isn't planning for the future, catching up with his fellow golf directors at Praia D'El Rey, West Cliffs and Bom Sucesso and has a spare hour or two (often rare given the nature of a golf director's role), Castelo Branco can usually be found out the course with members, staff or industry friends.

"The signature hole is the second which I think is great," he added. "There are some other very good holes. 11 is another par five and the finishing holes are excellent.

"But for me, the third is the hole. It's a par three with a sort of an island green, with very, very special pin positions either easy or almost impossible. And if you play it from the back tee you have beautiful views. From the back you have a 200-metre shot to a tricky pin. It's just a great golf hole." **END**

# STEVE SLINGER

## GENERAL MANAGER, HAYLING GOLF CLUB



If things had worked out differently for Steve Slinger, he admits, he might have been an English teacher. His mum was a head teacher... but his father was a golf professional at the Devon seaside resort of Sidmouth, where the ten-year-old Steve first caught the golf bug, and that's what, ultimately, determined his chosen profession.

In a way, it's been circular, as he's now back on the south coast as general manager at Hayling Golf Club, in Hampshire, fulfilling one long-held ambition: to work at a links course.

He explained: "I do love my history. I do love the traditions of the game and, of course, the links is where it originated.

"I absolutely love the real, raw, natural look that a links course has. Here at Hayling as well, we are a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), and we respect that hugely. Indeed, we embrace it. You've got this wonderful game of golf flowing in among the most incredible nature. And it's just nice to have that sea air, as well.

"Let's face it, there aren't many links courses, on the south coast. And I always wanted to manage a links. I played Hayling about 30-odd years ago in a county match and loved it then. I always thought to myself if the timing was right, if everything aligned, I'd be very interested in this role."

Slinger's route to Hayling was a little more circuitous than that of some of his Hayling members, who, as he says, can live in south-west London and "whizz down the A3 in an hour and play true links golf."

As a teen, he was offered a place at the University of Winchester, to study English,

but turned it down to attend Surrey's Merrist Wood College, instead, where he learned about the golf industry. While there he was 'poached' for the University of Surrey by a lecturer who worked at both establishments and studied sports science in tandem with his golf studies.

Already a Sussex county junior, he played for the uni's golf team and, representing Surrey, helped them win the 1997 British Universities Golf Championship, beating St Andrews in the final, at Lindrick.

His PGA training was undertaken at Orchardleigh GC, in Somerset, under the tutelage of former European Tour pro Peter Green, a man he now regards as a "surrogate father." After a couple of years as head pro at Orchardleigh, in 2000, he jumped at the chance to move to a post in Ireland, at the Killarney Golf & Fishing Club.

He enjoyed his time on the Emerald Isle, and it wasn't without its memorable moments.

"At the time, as a professional, I used to get my balls from Titleist, and would put my initials, SAS, on the balls. I remember playing a game of golf with some of the locals in Ireland – looking as I do, with no hair and being a little bit broad and all that – and they wondered what the hell I was doing in Kerry with SAS on the side of my golf balls. It was quite amusing."

The American market was huge for the club at that time, but, with the tragic events of 9/11, the bottom fell out of the market – "It was as if a light switch had been turned off," recalled Slinger – and he realised he needed to move again.







## “WHAT I WANTED WAS FOR PEOPLE TO FEEL LIKE THEY HAD ARRIVED AT A LINKS GOLF CLUB. PREVIOUSLY, WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVED AT HAYLING, YOU DIDN'T GET THAT SENSE”

He returned to England's south-west, as director of golf, at Manor House Golf Club – part of the Exclusive Hotels Group – in 2002, and, five years later, was asked to take on the role of general manager for the company's portfolio of golf clubs, based at Mannings Heath, in West Sussex. It was a hugely valuable experience.

Slinger said: “Exclusive Hotels is a fantastic company, but they are hoteliers through and through. I left on fantastic terms, but I fancied a change. And Effingham came calling in Surrey. I spent ten years at Effingham, as general manager, and I was able to utilise the commercial experience I gained from Exclusive Hotels.

“I had really got an insight into the way hoteliers look at their business model and was able to apply that thinking to the golf model, taking it into the private members arena at Effingham and now here at Hayling, in a way that is palatable for the members.”

He joined Hayling in January 2024 and was quick to implement changes – many of them aesthetic – to the historic club. He also found himself in a unique golfing environment.

“It's not just about the golf,” he explained. “While we're 140-plus years old, we've got a modern clubhouse that's only 25 years old, in an Art Deco style, with the most incredible views all the way around.

“We own the beach that goes around the golf course as well. We then have partners we work with: a kite surfing school; a cafe on the beach; and a sailing club on the beach. We also have Sinah Lake – a freshwater lake that runs alongside our 17th and 18th holes – so we've saltwater on one side and freshwater right next to it on the other. It's unique.”

He continued: “We've been able to make some physical enhancements. We went from probably having the worst-looking car park on the south coast to, now, I'd like to think, the best-looking car park on the south coast.

“And what I wanted was for people to feel like they had arrived at a links golf club. Previously, when you first arrived at Hayling, you didn't get that sense.

“We've got new signage in and around the car park – wooden sleepers, that sort of 'washed sea look' everywhere you look. We've fescue grass in and around

the boundaries, a new sign at the front, everything to make it a 'beachier' feel. I want people, when they come to the club, whether they're using the golf facility or not, to get that links vibe.

“The biggest thing, certainly in terms of investment so far, is that we've signed a five-year lease with Toro, as I was keen to make sure the guys here have the tools to do the job. The kit from Toro and the support has been outstanding.

“We're proud to be in the top 50 golf clubs in England, but since when has that ever been good enough? But nonetheless, we're very proud of that. And I wanted to ensure we're not, each year, asking, 'now, what do we need? What should we get?'

“It's more planned, now, to enable allow Graham Roberts, our course manager, and his team, to deliver that top-50 product. We've got budget certainty because we know where we are over the next five years.”

Aside from the normal golf club challenges he faces at Hayling, Slinger is also aware of the trials facing the golf industry as a whole in the UK.

He opined: “Pre-Covid, from my experience, an annual figure of mid-30,000 rounds was kind of the norm. Certainly, that's what we were doing at the clubs I was managing, and similarly here at Hayling, by all accounts. You look at the other side of Covid and clearly, there was a huge surge after the pandemic passed.

“But that number has certainly not gone back anywhere near to where it was. So we're now in the mid-40,000s in terms of total rounds. And that was very similar at Effingham as well.

“That's a great thing for the game of golf, but it is challenging if you're a member. The context has changed. It's not just new people into the game. It's members, as well, wanting to play more than, perhaps, they ever used to.

“So, I'm having to manage it carefully as I want to reduce the amount of golf that's played out there but give more times back to our members.”

That's great news for his members. But his efforts are also beneficial to those of us who wish to visit and experience what is, arguably, Hampshire's only true links course. One thing's for sure: a bright future beckons. Hayling's not ailing. **END**



**Words** Michael Lenihan  
**Online** saujana.com.my

# SA NATHAN

## GENERAL MANAGER, SAUJANA GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



Most 70-year-olds would be content to be playing a round of golf a week, maybe even two if their fitness allows... but Ananthanathan Sinnadurai – better known as SA Nathan – remains general manager of Saujana Golf & Country Club (SGCC), in Malaysia, and deals with the golfing demands of hundreds of people on a daily basis.

And yet, unlike many in similar roles around the world, Nathan has no golf pedigree; nor a PGA qualification; but he does have masses of experience.

He admits he's a marketing man. And, clearly, a marketer with some reputation. He'd already spent nine years at SGCC as head of marketing before returning for another nine years... you don't get asked back if you're not good at what you do.

Maybe it's his 37 years of marketing experience that enables him and SGCC to work so successfully with the adjacent five-star Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur (SHKL), because Nathan has to balance the demands of the hotel's stay-and-play guests with those of his members.

Modestly, he gives much of the credit for the smooth running of this side of the operation to the hotel's general manager, Jasmine Ong Li (pictured overleaf) who has been with SHKL for 28 years, initially in event sales, then business development, before working her way up to director of sales marketing.

Nathan smiled: "One of the wonderful things I notice is the working relationship between us. We have known each other for only 30 years, and we were young executives at the time. I was just a young marketing man joining from the age of 32.

"After college she comes and joins as another in sales and marketing. So, we have worked together well for so long.

"So far, no arguments, nothing. We work very collectively, very well. Like a family."

He explained: "Currently the policy of the board of directors is that non-members wishing to play, and visiting tour groups, must stay at the hotel. I may get enquiries from other hotel operators for their guests to play, but I tell them visiting golfers must stay at SHKL.

"There may be the odd exception, such as reciprocals from other European Tour Destination member clubs – who we've been working with since 2015 – but that's the current policy.

"Whenever there's a group, once it's firmed up, usually the hotel will do the arrangements in terms of the rooms and the F&B. And the golf club deals with the golf.

"I'm trying to make our packages more attractive," added Nathan. "I'm trying to build in a package where green fees, buggies and all are thrown in if there's a package. I'm working on that at the moment.

"Weekdays we've got a lot of slots available because a lot of members are working on weekdays. So, the stay-and-play package would be quite a good revenue earner. It's going to be a tough balance because the weekend slots are quite tough to get."

SGCC has two multi-award-winning 18-hole courses: the Ronald Fream-designed Palm Course and the Bunga Raya Course, which has recently undergone re-routing and reconstruction by the Australian firm of Parslow & Winter Golf Design.



## “MOST CLUBS LOOK AT THE REVENUE SIDE, WHEREAS MY CHAIRMAN IS VERY CONSCIOUS OF PEOPLE’S HEALTH”

Between them the courses have hosted nine Malaysian Opens and three Maybank Championships and, in 2002, the World Amateur Golf Team Championship, comprising the Eisenhower Trophy and the Espirito Santo Trophy.

Small wonder, then, that golfers visiting the country want to head to SGCC. But they need to be forewarned – and not just about the requisite booking at SHKL.

For those of us wedded to the traditional European way of golf resort management, some of the parameters Nathan works within might seem surprising, but we should remember, Selangor is more than 10,000 kilometres from London and the culture is different in Malaysia.

For example, the minimum make-up of a group on the tee in the morning is three; if you’re in a two-ball, you’ll be placed with another two-ball, or an individual golfer, before the starter lets you head off. Those who are unaware of the rule will remember it once they’ve waited around to join another group.

“The decision was made by the board, and, also, by the golf committee. We started having one person taking a slot, and we want to maximise the numbers. So that’s why the board decided, at least in the morning, it’s a minimum three-ball, which is better for the group following behind.

“If, for example, you’re telling the starters you’ve got a two-ball and the third sometimes doesn’t come up we try to get them matched up with another two-ball.”

There is certainly a requirement to get as many golfers on the course as possible in the morning. Because of the climate, the majority of members – and, one presumes, visitors from SHKL – want to tee-off early and finish before 1pm. Mad dogs and Englishmen spring to mind.

There are some areas, however, where SGCC is, arguably, more traditional than most of its European contemporaries.

Nathan explained: “We are one of the few clubs in the country that allows walking. Many of our members walk the course. Most clubs look at the revenue side, whereas my chairman is very conscious of people’s health. So, the chairman allows walking for members. Visiting golfers, however, must take a buggy – we use Club Car here.”

And, in keeping with golf everywhere else – especially on the professional tours – occasionally, slow play can be problematic.

Nathan smiled: “Most of them, 99 per cent, are OK, but there’s always one. We’ve got marshals on the golf course and sometimes the marshals themselves have problems telling them to speed up play. And I tell the marshals, if you still can’t move them along, you give their names to me, and I’ll write to them officially.”

Now, that is traditional. A slap on the wrist from the powers-that-be. And rightly so, I might add. But not all traditions are easy to enforce.

“One of the challenges that we face here, I think not only in Saujana or Malaysia, is the etiquette part of it, getting the members to replace the divots, repair pitch marks and rake the bunkers,” laments Nathan

“Sometimes we have caddies, but sometimes the caddies are on a first-come, first-served basis, and when that happens, the members play and sometimes they don’t repair their own pitch marks, because the caddy normally does that. Some of them don’t even rake their bunkers.

“We are not forcing them to take caddies here. It’s more of choice whether or not, but if you don’t want to take a caddy, then you should replace your own divots and repair pitch marks. When I played golf in Australia, I saw the etiquette there,” he states.

So, what next for SGCC? Nathan has no need to ponder the question. He doesn’t break stride.

“Five years from now, I think you’ll see the golf course will be considered more challenging. We are looking at some of the holes and how we can improve them. We are also talking to the European Tour Destinations people to give us some good advice on that.

“You always want to ensure the course is challenging and always in good condition. The logistics part is something we are, also, studying; where the player just comes and drops a bag and goes to the tee box and the bag is waiting for them.

“We are also looking at refurbishing many of our facilities, like the changing rooms.”

Not resting on one’s laurels, now there’s a welcome break from tradition. **END**

# MACHRIHANISH DUNES

MACHRIHANISHDUNES.COM

**Words** Aidan Patrick  
**Location** Argyll, Scotland

If you believe links golf is as much about landscape as it is about scoring, Machrihanish Dunes deserves a place on your personal pilgrimage map.

On the remote edge of western Scotland, there is a truly special destination. Nestled in the southwest corner of the Mull of Kintyre, where the sea, sand, wind, and grazing

sheep have shaped the natural world for centuries, Machrihanish Dunes feels less like it was built than discovered.

Woven through ancient dunes and grasses that existed long before any yardage book, the landscape provided inspiration for David Maclay-Kidd to create something truly remarkable.



Here, the sea becomes a soundtrack and the wind a collaborator. For those who crave authentic links golf, Machrihanish Dunes is not an afterthought; it is the destination.

Reaching Kintyre requires intention, which adds to its allure. The peninsula sits deep in Scotland's southwest, bordered by the Atlantic and graced with expansive skies, breathtaking views of the Paps of Jura, and the northern coast of Ireland.

Whether you arrive by car, navigating lochs and mountain passes, by a short flight, or by a seasonal ferry, the journey itself builds anticipation. When the dunes finally emerge and the scent of salt fills the air, you know you've traded convenience for something rare: golf that's truly at home in its setting.

This sense of escape sets Machrihanish Dunes apart from more manicured destinations. The slower pace of Campbeltown, its active harbour, and the hum of local life all provide a rooted authenticity that tourist hotspots cannot replicate. A true pilgrimage should shift your sense of time and place; Machrihanish Dunes does exactly that.

The claim of being "natural" isn't just marketing here. Machrihanish Dunes earns it. The routing slips through a protected dunescape with minimal earth movement, reshaping only green complexes and tees, and letting fairways follow the land's own contours. Greens and tees nestle into natural shelves, fairways rise and fall as nature intended.





# IF LINKS GOLF IS A CONVERSATION WITH THE ELEMENTS, MACHRIHANISH DUNES IS FLUENT

Walking the course, you feel the spring of tight seaside turf, the subtle breaks visible only in the right light, and the way the ball gathers and releases according to the landscape rather than artificial design.

This approach fosters strategic variety that cannot be engineered. One day, a mid-iron will chase down a ridge for twenty yards; the next, into a stiff wind, you'll need a bump-and-run from sixty yards. You learn to flight wedges low, adjust your stance for the breeze, and discover that your putter from off the green is more tool than fallback.

This is golf that prioritises decisions and creativity over mechanics.

The holes at Machrihanish Dunes both teach and test. You remember the demands of the terrain — a tee shot framed by land that requires commitment.

A short par four where the bold option is the driver and caution suggests an iron; a par three playing along the shoreline with the wind making club selection a chess match. Angles matter; playing safely often leaves you a semi-blind approach over a dune, while the riskier line rewards you with a clearer path to the green.

The greens themselves are perhaps the strongest aspect of the course, with subtle undulations that reward imagination more than force. Leave your ball above the hole, and you'll have to contend with pace, wind, and the faintest of borrows; land on the right quadrant, and the hole opens up.

On dry days, the ball skips; in softer weather, it sits and spins. The course encourages you to pay attention to both the air and the ground.

If links golf is a conversation with the elements, Machrihanish Dunes is fluent. The wind is a perpetual presence, shifting in tempo and direction throughout the round. Gentle morning breezes can build into afternoon gales, and the closing holes feel transformed by a late-day wind. Bring your low punch shots, controlled swings, and patience — they will all be necessary.

Yet, there are also tranquil moments. When the wind abates, the sea glitters and the evening light turns golden, the course becomes invitingly playable. Fairways widen, carries shorten, and putts seem more makeable. These are the moments that entice you back the next morning, convinced you've unlocked its secrets — until the first Atlantic breeze reminds you otherwise.

Sustainability here is more than a slogan; it's a guiding principle. Maintenance aligns with the native ecology. Fescues dominate, irrigation is minimal, and the agronomy lets coastal turf thrive — firm, fine-leafed, and drought-resistant.

Expect varied lies in the rough, from balls perched on wispy grass to those tucked down, and accept these quirks as the price of playing golf embedded in a living landscape.

For the resort's operators, sustainability is both ethical and strategic. Lower water use, fewer chemicals, and a native-first approach foster both authenticity and resilience.

Machrihanish Dunes offers more than just its golf course, but never in ways that detract from the golfing experience.

Accommodation is provided at The Royal Hotel in central Campbeltown, The Ugadale Hotel in Machrihanish village, and eight two-bedroom cottages on the beach.

The style is comfortable, with period architecture and modern amenities that feel distinctively Scottish rather than generically luxurious. Dining is hearty and local, with fresh seafood and whiskies that remind you of the region's storied past. Everything is raw and authentic.

In terms of when to visit, late spring through early autumn offers the most consistent firm conditions and long days, though the quieter shoulder seasons can be magical, with fewer people and softer light.

Winter is more bracing but atmospheric — just be sure to pack appropriately.

To play your best, equip yourself for flighted control, and consider a driving iron or strong three-wood off the tee, and practise bump-and-runs and long putts ahead of time. Expect to think and take your time over tee shots, and if possible, enlist a caddie — local knowledge here is invaluable.

Machrihanish Dunes is a course to play more than once. The first round is reconnaissance; the second, revelation. With experience, lines emerge, and strategies shift. It's a course that trusts its land and invites you to trust your game.

Exciting times lie ahead for golf on the Kintyre peninsular with planning consent approved for a new 18 hole course and additional accommodation options. There is no doubt that this will further enhance the reasoning to make one of golf great pilgrimages. **END**



**Words** Christopher Stratford  
**Online** clubcar.com

# ANDY BOURKE

## REGIONAL SALES MANAGER, CLUB CAR



Everyone likes to see a DP World Tour event go to a sudden-death play-off – with, perhaps, the exception of the participants – but no one is more satisfied with this outcome than Club Car.

"If there was a play-off every week we would absolutely love that," smiles Andy Bourke, Regional Sales Manager UK, Ireland, Scandinavia and Iceland. "For us, it is a great window into our product and what it can do and where it can be used, and obviously great advertising."

The DP World Tour has been one of the American global brand's partners for 20 years and during sudden-death duels the combatants are sure to have TV cameras linger on them as they are whisked to the chosen tees in golf carts bearing Club Car's iconic livery and branding.

"I was in one of the hospitality units at the side of the 18th green at Wentworth last year in the PGA when Rory McIlroy and Billy Horschel were picked up right in front of us to be ferried all the way back down to the 18th tee – and all you can see on the TV feed is these two guys sitting in Club Cars.

"Anyone that's in golf, general managers, club owners, directors of golf, anyone that's watching that, they are seeing it's Club Car again."

It is clear that the 33-year-old's enormous passion for his job and his determination to help the company increase their grip on the major share of the small-wheel utility vehicle market is matched by his contentment at being a part of the golfing industry. "I love the industry, I love the golf business," he says with unabashed and refreshing zeal.

"I think anyone who is in it is incredibly lucky. It's full of fantastic people."

Two men whom he places at the top in the level of "fantastic people" are Kevin Hart, Club Car's Sales Director for EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa), and former PGA captain Eddie Bullock.

It was Hart who provided the opportunity for Bourke to join Club Car five years ago – the pair had previously been rivals when the latter was working for E-Z-Go – while Bullock was a mentor and inspiration during Bourke's time at Bournemouth University where he studied for a BSc in Golf Management.

Bullock, captain of the PGA at the time, was lecturing at Bournemouth and, as Bourke approached the end of his degree course, cautioned him against pursuing his intended career as a players' agent.

"Eddie said, 'well generally you need to be in the business a little bit of time, you need to have built up a network. Why don't you look at something more to do with sales? I've got an opportunity at this company to look after selling golf carts in the UK.'

"Me, being the kind of jumped-up, overly ambitious little thing that I was at the time, said, 'Eddie, that sounds terrible, why would I want to do that?'"

Bourke did apply for and get the job, as an area sales representative, and it was only on later reflection that he realised he had already displayed a talent for persuading people to buy from him.

"At the age of 16 I managed to talk my parents into letting me go and live in Preston at Myerscough College to do a National



# "ANYONE THAT'S IN GOLF, GENERAL MANAGERS, CLUB OWNERS, DIRECTORS OF GOLF, ANYONE THAT'S WATCHING THAT, THEY ARE SEEING IT'S CLUB CAR AGAIN"

Diploma in Golf Studies. If I could sell that to my parents at 16 I think maybe I had a bit of an ability that I didn't know I had."

His interest in golf began around the age of 10 or 11 when he lived alongside Birchwood Golf Club in Cheshire "on the side of a par-3, so I grew up with golf in my back garden."

By 16 his handicap was down to three, but he regards himself as fortunate that he "never had the illusion that I could go and play on tour and I think maybe some people get stuck in that."

What he did develop during his time at Myerscough was an unshakeable desire to work within golf.

"It is an absolutely fantastic college, a real good window into golf at a young age. Great set-up, great facilities, nine-hole course on site, indoor studio with what at the time was the best technology.

"If you were a keen golfer and wanted to improve that element everything was there. I didn't really improve my game, but there were plenty of modules on the business of golf, about finance and management and learning about strategy.

"Finishing up at Myerscough I started looking at what I wanted to do. It made me realise that there were a lot of opportunities in the golf business away from playing."

He migrated to Bournemouth University – "one of the few universities that did a golf management degree" – where his final-year encounter with Bullock set him on a path that led to Club Car and the chance to help promote and sell what he regards as the "Bentley or Ferrari" of utility vehicles.

Not just to the golfing world. "Golf is roughly 70 per cent of our business. The massive market for us outside golf would be hotels and resorts. Education is a big one, so schools, universities, colleges all over Europe, leisure and camping also. I was in Finland recently and as I walked through the airport there was a Club Car staring me in the face."

Recently two custom-built electric cars were delivered to Pope Leo XIV, which the pontiff will utilise on his international visits.

Club Car has an ongoing partnership with the Ryder Cup that extends to almost 25 years, and a fleet of more than 600 of its

vehicles will play a massive role this year at Bethpage Black in New York. Other partnerships include those with St Andrews Links, the PGA, the UK Golf Foundation and the European Institute of Golf Course Architects.

But Bourke says Club Car endeavours to give the same attention to a small local golf course that has two Club Cars as they do to places such as The Belfry and Celtic Manor, that have approaching 150 each.

His wife Lucy has known him since his university days, so is long accustomed to his need to travel for his work and "has supported me to help me pursue my passion in the golf industry. There is no question that without her by my side I would not be where I am today, doing what I love."

The job has afforded him some glorious opportunities, such as playing golf at midnight in Iceland – "the sun started setting at 10:30pm and then almost hung there like it had been frozen" – and more recently in two countries in the same day.

"We played nine holes in the morning at Estonia Golf and Country Club then we jumped on the ferry across to Finland and drove up to Linna Golf."

He and Lucy have a near one-year-old son named Rory, not after the grand slam winner although their fox-red labrador Henrik was named after the 2016 Open Champion "so that when I shouted his name at the park only one dog would come running back."

He concludes: "I have been very fortunate over my career to have Eddie and to have Kevin and a few other people, like Brian Swinden [Golf Buggies GB], that have been really instrumental to my development and have gone out of their way to help me, to give me opportunities and bring me opportunities, people you can use as a sounding board.

"Brian gave me access to everything, and he gave me access to make a few mistakes as well. I think you need to work for someone who can let you fail a little bit because when the good times are good we are all great, aren't we?

"The team at Club Car is great and they have given me the room to develop. It really is a great company with great products and passionate people." **END**

# ECAT SEEKING TO MARK TIME WITH STYLISH CLOCKS ON TIMELESS GOLF COURSES



When it comes to timekeeping, the pace of play on the golf course is one of the hot topics of conversation within the industry.

And whilst many general managers and directors of golf do their utmost to ensure that golfers get around the course as quickly as possible, ensuring that they arrive in plenty of time ahead of their allotted tee-time, is also a crucial part of process.

Most mid-to-high end clubs – many of whom employ starters – will request that golfers arrive on the first tee ten minutes ahead of their allotted time, which perhaps explains why so many clubs across the world are installing city clocks around the course, to gently remind patrons of their responsibilities.

And one of the leading manufacturers of these stylish timepieces are Italian manufacturer ECAT.

Founded in 1971 in Mondovì, a city in northern Italy with an established industrial and artisan history, the company began as a provider of electrical and control systems for industrial applications. It later specialised in the design and production of precision clocks for public, institutional, and architectural purposes.

The original workshop expanded gradually, maintaining a focus on mechanical quality, reliability, and aesthetic design. In the 1980s and 1990s, ECAT developed a reputation in Italy for manufacturing tower and street clocks, as well as bell automation systems used in churches and civic facilities.

By integrating traditional Italian craftsmanship with advanced electronic technologies and production techniques, ECAT

produced timekeeping systems that combined durability, visual appeal, and technical innovation. The company was among the early adopters in Italy of radio-controlled and GPS synchronisation technologies in public clocks, enabling precise and autonomous operation.

At present, ECAT operates as an independent and vertically integrated manufacturer. All components, from mechanical parts to electronics and software, are designed, manufactured, and assembled internally by its engineering and technical staff.

This approach enables the company to offer custom solutions, product reliability, and ongoing technical support for clients such as municipalities and private entities.

The company provides products internationally, including completed projects across Europe, the United States, the Middle East, and other regions.

And from September 2025, ECAT plans to open a representative office in Dubai to serve architects, developers, and business partners in the Gulf region.

ECAT clocks are installed in various locations such as urban areas, parks, railway stations, airports, universities, pedestrian zones, sports complexes, resorts, hotels, and retail spaces. The company has also been selected for collaborative projects with several Italian brands.

In 2016, ECAT produced a large exterior clock for the Pagani Automobili facility in Modena and has worked with Panerai to develop custom time displays to match their standards.



# “AS THEY SEE IT, A CLOCK IS NOT ONLY A TOOL — IT’S A LANDMARK. A WAY TO SHAPE SPACE AND PERCEPTION. A WAY TO TURN TIME INTO SOMETHING TANGIBLE”

But it is in the golf sector where the Italian manufacturer is now focused, with ambitious plans to provide golf clubs of every size and stature, the ability to stylishly enhance the club’s identity and brand to members and visitors alike.

While ECAT offers a range of industrial and monumental clock models, the most relevant option for most golf clubs is the CityClock... a GPS synchronised street clock.

CityClock was developed to combine Italian design, precision engineering, and nearly zero maintenance operation. Born from the expertise of ECAT’s engineers, CityClock is designed to function autonomously for many years on long-life battery power, integrating GPS for absolute accuracy and automatic correction of hand position — ideal for uninterrupted outdoor use.

Key specifications and features include GPS synchronisation and self correction; automatic time adjustment even after power outages, and DST time changes and maintaining precision at one-thousandth of a second per year.

The CityClock comes with a long-life lithium battery — for power usage up to nine years — or a 220 AC hard-wired connection, and can be pole, wall or ceiling mounted.

Made from oven-varnished galvanized steel and aluminium with epoxy powder coating, all CityClocks are guaranteed IP55 weather resistance, and include Plexiglas or unbreakable acrylic cover for UV and shock protection.

Available in modular and customisable designs, golf clubs have numerous options to choose from including single or double-faced clock faces featuring classic, modern or industrial numerals plus the option of LED lighting for night-time visibility.

Plus, every golf club has the option to integrate their club’s logo directly onto the clock dial, ensuring continuity of branding across the course.

“CityClock’s blend of functional reliability and architectural elegance makes it especially suitable for outdoor settings like golf clubs, luxury resorts, boutique hotels, and upscale public environments,” said Valentina Giacardi of ECAT.

“Positioned at entrances, first tees, or walkways, it serves as both a practical way-finder and a refined design element.

“And to help golf club managers to visualize how a clock could look like on their golf course, we have created an online CityClock Configurator — available on our website — which features different models, mounting configurations, and customisations in real time to help create the perfect clock before ordering,” added Giacardi.

ECAT is a family-owned Italian company with origins dating back to Amilcare Gallo and his brother Sergio Gallo, two skilled technicians with a shared passion for mechanical precision and industrial design.

Together, they laid the foundation for what would become one of Italy’s leading manufacturers of monumental and civic clocks.

In the early years, the company operated as a small technical workshop focused on control systems and electrical automation.

It was Lucetta Beccaria, Amilcare’s wife, who soon joined the project and helped consolidate the company’s management and operational framework. Her presence marked the beginning of ECAT as a true family enterprise—a characteristic that still defines the company today.

Amilcare, Lucetta, and their son Maurizio Gallo now guide the company together, combining decades of technical, administrative, and strategic experience. Under their leadership, ECAT has embraced modern technologies such as GPS synchronisation, remote diagnostics, while maintaining the values and spirit of its artisanal roots.

The company operates with a close-knit team of 18 employees, including technical, and production staff — a structure that ensures both agility and depth of knowledge.

“What sets ECAT apart is its ability to blend engineering precision with architectural sensitivity — a skill passed down through generations,” added Giacardi.

“Working side by side, Amilcare, Lucetta, and Maurizio Gallo continue to lead the company with a shared vision: to create timepieces that are technically rigorous, visually distinctive, and built to last.

“As they see it, a clock is not only a tool — it’s a landmark. A way to shape space and perception. A way to turn time into something tangible.

“Our goal is to turn timekeeping into an integral part of architectural storytelling,” concluded Giacardi. **END**



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“NO OTHER SPORT COMES CLOSE TO PLACING SUCH A VOLUME  
OF VENUES ON A PEDESTAL”



**Words**

Sean Noble  
CEO  
Azalea

## GUEST BOOK

SEAN NOBLE



Don't ask me why but after 25 years in the golf industry the wonderful opportunity had never presented itself to me – to play the Old Course at St Andrews. I had visited St Andrews many times and even played a couple of its courses but never the most hallowed of all.

Imagine my glee then, when an invitation landed for the week after The Open. Three days later, having played through a variety of opening tee shots and classic holes in my mind, was about when my nemesis – my lower back – decided to down tools, perhaps overburdened with the pressure of the challenge. Suffice to say, I had to decline the invitation and thus still waiting to 'pop my OC cherry'. But it got me wondering how our beautiful game is unique in the global clamour to experience golf's greatest venues.

No other sport comes close to placing such a volume of venues on a pedestal – and one can experience golfing nirvana at nearly all the top-rated courses. Take Royal Portrush, scene of the Scheffler cakewalk at this year's Open Championship. I was lucky enough to tee it up there prior to The Open in 2019 and it was a thoroughly memorable experience.

Professionally, I have been fortunate to represent and experience many of the finest courses on the planet, and realise how blessed we are to have such a deep and engaging plethora of golfing riches to explore.

Now, did somebody say St Andrews? **END**

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