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NUMBER 156 | AUTUMN 2026

Rain Bird Upgrade Reinforces Tournament Support At Bernardus



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FAIR COMMENT

Golfers have always accepted that the game is difficult. We'll battle wind, rough, bunkers, awkward lies, questionable swing thoughts, and the occasional existential crisis on the 14th tee. What we shouldn't have to battle is our mobile phones — yet here we are, in 2026, still pretending that digital scorecards and on-course apps are somehow making golf "better". They aren't. They're a pain in the arse.

Take my recent shotgun start. A brisk walk to the tee, spirits high... and then poof. My data network dropped out like a disgruntled caddie.

Suddenly I couldn't open the scoring app, couldn't register my start, couldn't do anything except stare at a spinning loading wheel while my playing partners looked on with that familiar mixture of sympathy and impatience.

Golf is hard enough without IT issues. You're already trying to remember whether your last swing felt like a controlled fade or a controlled disaster — you don't need your phone staging a mutiny. And this isn't even my worst moment.

My golf bag and trolley — including my smartphone — recently decided to go for a swim at my home course, Felixstowe Ferry... watching your clubs roll towards a greenside burn is a special kind of heartbreak, somewhat akin to England losing a World Cup semi-final (again).

And after forking out for a new phone due to the resulting water damage, it now lives in a waterproof pouch in my bag, zipped away like a naughty child. It does not come out. It does not get used. If it wants to check WhatsApp, it can do it from the bottom of the pocket....

READ THE FULL COMMENT ONLINE
golfmanagement.online/magazines/autumn-2026



Words

Michael Lenihan
Publisher



FEATURING

AUTUMN 2026



ANDREW JOHNSTON

SENTOSA GOLF CLUB

"The values that he had because of what his father gave him were very strong values that bled out in all of us. Things such as if you're not five minutes early for a meeting, you're late and how you dress and how you act."

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JON BROOK

SHURA LINKS

"The opportunity to be involved from the beginning of a landmark project – helping shape Saudi Arabia's first island resort golf course – was a compelling challenge professionally and personally."

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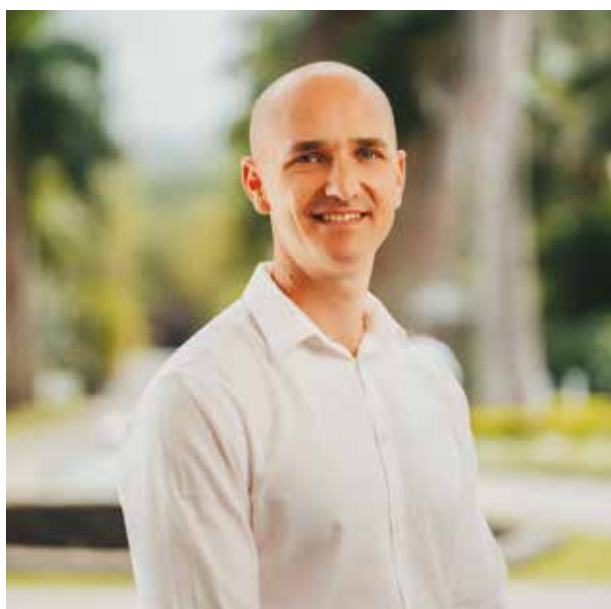


MARK SANDERSON

BEDLINGTONSHIRE GOLF CLUB

"Retailers rocketed because of the Trackman studio, and the impact of the putting studio has been phenomenal. We have sold more putters this year than in the previous four years combined."

30



RYAN DODDS

HERITAGE GOLF CLUB

"It is not sustainable if you fly in expertise every year and leave nothing behind. The real legacy is when Mauritians are running world-class events, developing careers and showing what can be done here."

34



RICHARD ALLEN

ECOBUNKER

"That's just my engineering brain in action, trying to find simple solutions to real life problems. As we've expanded internationally, we've found those challenges vary from country to country, but there is always a solution that we can develop."

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"THE UPGRADE WAS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT REPLACING OLD HARDWARE.
IT WAS ABOUT PREPARING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR MAJOR
CHAMPIONSHIPS, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE"



COVER STORY

RAINBIRD.COM



As host venue for the 2026 Solheim Cup, Bernardus Golf in the Netherlands must deliver championship conditions that meet the expectations of players, officials and spectators. Supported by Rain Bird, that standard relies on long-term preparation, dependable technology and proven infrastructure capable of performing under the most demanding conditions.

The course presents a distinctive agonomic challenge. Undulating pure fescue greens, extensive bunkering, natural rough and sandy soils define its character. As extreme weather increases, precise water application and rapid response are essential.

Wind is one of the largest variables on site, affecting evapotranspiration, sprinkler performance and moisture distribution. For Bernardus, uncertainty is not an option; they need complete confidence in their system, partners and supply network.

Bernardus previously operated a Stratus II Pro irrigation system, which had served the club well for many years. Rising expectations and advances in technology created an opportunity to improve communication, diagnostics, visibility and control.

The move to the Rain Bird IC System with CirrusPRO central control was an investment in championship-ready infrastructure.

"The upgrade was not simply about replacing old hardware. It was about preparing the infrastructure for major championships, now and in the future," said Niall Richardson, course superintendent.

Enhanced diagnostics help identify issues before they affect presentation, with moisture monitoring remaining central, helping to identify dry spots, track variability and avoid unnecessary applications.

By combining field data, weather information, visual assessment and irrigation feedback, the Bernardus team can decide where water is truly needed.

"CirrusPRO has been a huge help for us. If we see problems, we can report them directly onto the system... that's very helpful in high-pressure times of the season like drought or high temperatures where you can't be everywhere all at once," added Roberto Nardari, second assistant.

Successful tournament preparation also depends on strong partnerships. The installation was completed in two phases, allowing the course to remain operational with minimal disruption, thanks to close collaboration between Bernardus, contractor Smits Veldhoven and Rain Bird.

That support continues into tournament delivery, and Rain Bird will have a dedicated Global Service Plan engineer on site in September during Solheim Cup week.

For Bernardus, the upgraded Rain Bird IC System with CirrusPRO central control provides more than technical capability. It gives the greenkeeping team confidence to respond to extreme weather, protect course conditions and deliver the consistent championship experience befitting of the Solheim Cup. **END**

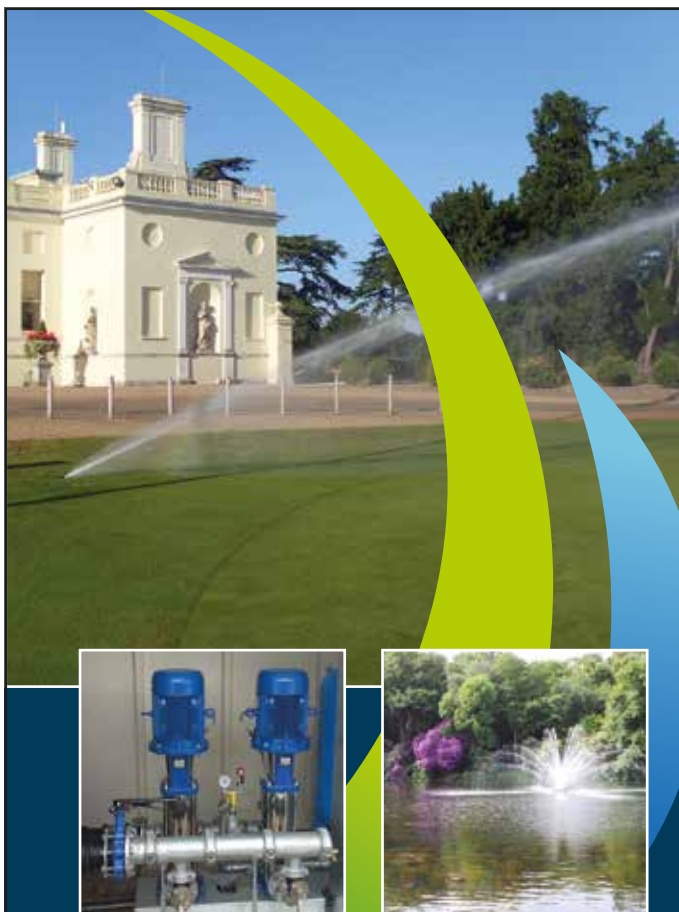


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THE HACKER'S RETURN

Initially, it was my knee; then my back; then my ankle; and then my knee again. And, in-between the injuries – or excuses, as She Who Must Be Obeyed referred to them – there was my weight issue. But now, more than five years on from my last round of golf, I'm preparing to hit the fairways, once more. Will I still be the player I was back then? I sincerely hope not. I was useless.

Indeed, I firmly believe that I was one of the reasons the World Handicap System increased the maximum handicap to 54. I still live in hope that it will increase further. But a positive mind set, a more relaxed me, and a loss of more than four stone (more than 25kg for you European types), has left me optimistic that, at 63, I may finally be able to complete a round of 18 holes again – albeit with the aid of a buggy, several oxygen canisters, and the odd mulligan.

A friend of mine in the village where I now live had joined the nearby Yeovil Golf Club, and suggested, if my arthritic body could be persuaded to play ball, I join him down at the driving range. This is, bear in mind, the same pal who persuaded me to try walking football two years ago, and I haven't regretted that for a second, so I was easily swayed.

My first visit was, as the youngsters are prone to say, 'Meh!'. But I, and he, persisted, and while most of my shots continued to be wayward, they were, let's say, slightly less wayward than they had been. I also enjoyed being around a golf club again. While I'm sure I will never be a member anywhere, there's a certain relaxed and convivial ambience at the club that is desirable at my age. Sitting around on the clubhouse terrace, after a session at the range, supping an ice-cold pint of cider – I do live in Somerset now, so it's compulsory – fits perfectly with the semi-retirement I envisaged when I first reduced my working hours.

It also delays the moment when SWMBO demands I join her in the garden and clear up the detritus left after she's spent a couple of hours wielding the hedge-trimmer and secateurs – which always necessitates a visit to the council recycling centre. And I need to stress this, emphatically: while I enjoy sitting in the garden, I do not, nor will I ever, do 'gardening'. I'm not exactly Howard Hughes, but I do not like getting my hands dirty, either literally or metaphorically – which is why I failed my interview with an organised crime syndicate.

The weekly trips to the 'tip' are traumatic enough. Although I always wear gloves when handling the many bags of 'green waste', I know that the inside of the gloves themselves aren't clean and have to use a cleansing wipe when back in the car before I can drive off. However, I am prepared to grip a golf club and brandish it in a manner vaguely similar to that of its original intent.

Therefore, I will be back on the golf course, soon; so, please, if you're in Somerset, be aware of wayward golf balls flying in your direction, even if you're simply driving through the county on the

A303. **END**



NEWS IN BRIEF

GOLFMANAGEMENT.ONLINE/NEWS



THE GROVE SIGNS LANDMARK TEN-YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH TORO

The Grove has secured a long-term partnership with Toro and Reesink UK, continuing a 22-year relationship and ushering in a new era of integrated turf management. As part of a significant new ten-year agreement, which strengthens a relationship that has existed since the Hertfordshire resort opened more than two decades ago, The Grove has invested in a full machinery fleet renewal and update alongside the installation of a new irrigation system across the entire course.

SEARCH 'THE GROVE' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



PING LAUNCHES OFFICIAL 2026 EUROPEAN SOLHEIM CUP APPAREL COLLECTION

PING has officially launched their 2026 European Solheim Cup Team uniform, giving golf fans the opportunity to wear the same designs that Team Europe will sport at Bernardus Golf in the Netherlands this September. The uniform replicates the three competition-day looks that have been created in collaboration with PING's Global Creative Director, Fiona Reilly, and European Solheim Cup Captain Anna Nordqvist, combining premium performance fabrics with a bold European identity.

SEARCH 'SOLHEIM CUP' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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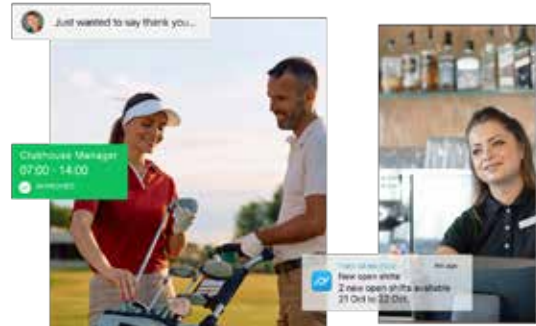


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GOLF CLUBS TURN RENTAL FLEETS INTO REVENUE WINNERS WITH POWAKADDY

Rental electric trolleys are proving to be one of the most effective revenue generators available to golf clubs and on-course retailers, with more venues than ever investing in reliable, premium Powakaddy fleets to increase profitability while enhancing the golfer experience. The brand has reported a 35 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of golf clubs and resorts purchasing rental fleets, while orders for rental trolleys with GPS have risen by 34 per cent compared to last year thanks to the introduction of the CT10 GPS.

SEARCH 'POWAKADDY' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GALVIN GREEN TAKES THE LAB COLLECTION IN A BOLD NEW DIRECTION

Premium high-tech golf apparel brand Galvin Green is taking THE LAB collection in a bold new direction, unveiling a striking second instalment that combines distinctive new colour combinations with advanced technical fabrics and contemporary silhouettes engineered to challenge the elements. Following the launch of THE LAB franchise earlier this year, the latest collection continues Galvin Green's focus on pushing the boundaries of golf apparel through an experimental approach to design and performance.

SEARCH 'GALVIN GREEN' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GRAND RESORT BAD RAGAZ UNVEILS NEW GREENS ON CHAMPIONSHIP COURSE

Grand Resort Bad Ragaz in Switzerland has unveiled a completely rebuilt 18-hole Championship Course with new putting and chipping greens. The new greens will enhance the playing conditions for members, guests, and professionals. Working with internationally recognised golf course architect Peter Harradine, the updates set a new benchmark in sustainability, resource efficiency, and course quality.

SEARCH 'BAD RAGAZ' ONLINE

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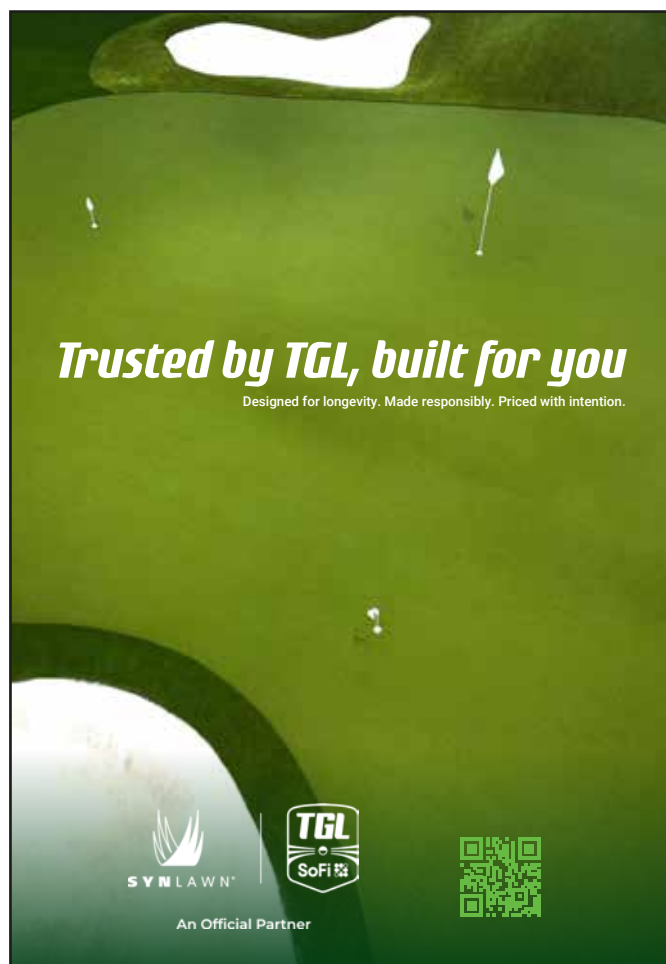
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AUTOMATED ROBOTICS PREPARES FOR 2026 HUSQVARNA BRITISH MASTERS

Husqvarna technology is playing a crucial role in preparing The Belfry's iconic Brabazon Course for the 2026 Husqvarna British Masters hosted by Sir Nick Faldo, as the venue builds towards the arrival of the DP World Tour's leading players from August 26–30. In the build-up to the championship, seven Husqvarna CEORA robotic mowers are maintaining the fairways of the four-time Ryder Cup venue, working consistently across the course to help produce the exacting standards required for elite tournament golf.

SEARCH 'HUSQVARNA' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



JEREMY VINCENT JOINS ADVANCED TURF TECHNOLOGY

Advanced Turf Technology (ATT) has significantly strengthened its UK team with the appointment of Jeremy Vincent as Sales Manager. Bringing more than three decades of industry experience to the role, Jeremy will be responsible for promoting both the iconic INFINICUT mower range and TMSYSTEM collection of maintenance cassettes, developing customer relationships and supporting the dealer network throughout the UK and Europe.

SEARCH 'JEREMY VINCENT' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



LONDON GOLF CLUB'S PAUL STUART RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS PGA AWARD

London Golf Club's head PGA professional, Paul Stuart, has been honoured with a PGA Fellow award, one of the most prestigious accolades a PGA professional can achieve, in recognition of more than three decades of service, coaching excellence and leadership at the Kent venue. Stuart joined London Golf Club 32 years ago and has since become one of the most respected figures in the club's history.

SEARCH 'PAUL STUART' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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ST ENODOC TAKES A JOINED UP APPROACH WITH TORO

St Enodoc Golf Club has committed to Toro in a significant, multi-year investment that includes a tailored fleet of machinery and an upgrade to its irrigation infrastructure and technology. The investment represents the club's first major fleet renewal in a decade and was developed over a three-year period with DGM LTD and Reesink Turfcare. It reflects a carefully planned transition designed to align with the club's evolving agronomic and operational requirements.

SEARCH 'ST ENDOC' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



TRUMP TURNBERRY OPENS TRUMP'S TWELVE, PAR-THREE COURSE

Trump's Twelve, a spectacular new 12-hole par-three course at Trump Turnberry, officially opened this week on August 10, adding a new dimension to one of the world's most celebrated golfing destinations. Featuring holes ranging from 70 to 206 yards, the course combines undulating greens, imaginative green surrounds, natural wasteland areas and carefully positioned water features to create a dramatic short-course layout for golfers of all ages and abilities.

SEARCH 'TURNBERRY' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story



CLUB CAR HELPS SET THE STANDARD AT ROCK GOLF IN FINLAND

Rock Golf in Finland, one of the most exciting new golf venues in Europe, has praised the quality of its Club Car golf fleet during its first full season. The stunning 9-hole par-3 venue, 26 miles west of Helsinki, opened in June 2025 and offers a 'more social, fun and faster golf experience'. It is aiming to become the best par-3 course in the world. Club Car, a global industry-leading manufacturer of small-wheel, zero-emissions electric vehicles, has supplied 26 Tempo golf carts, complete with Connect technology and Visage screens, premium seats and customised paintwork.

SEARCH 'ROCK GOLF' ONLINE

at golfmanagement.online for the full story

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SCAN ME



TGI GOLF PARTNERS GAIN ACCESS TO POWER TEE THROUGH NEW SUPPLIER PARTNERSHIP

As golf facilities across the UK and Ireland continue to invest in driving range technology to increase revenue, improve the customer experience and attract more golfers, TGI Golf has announced a new partnership with Power Tee, the world's leading automatic golf ball teeing technology, making the company a new TGI Golf Partner Supplier. The partnership gives TGI Golf Partner facilities across the UK and Ireland access to exclusive commercial opportunities on one of the industry's fastest-growing driving range technologies.

SEARCH 'THE HAWTHORN BY 'TGI GOLF' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



GOLF GENIUS APPOINTS SEAN DAINTY AS MANAGING DIRECTOR – INTERNATIONAL

Golf Genius has appointed Sean Dainty as Managing Director – International as the company continues to accelerate its growth across global golf markets. Dainty joins Golf Genius at a pivotal time for the business, which today supports more than 11,000 clients, associations and organisations across more than 60 countries worldwide, including partnerships with more than 20 national golf federations and associations.

SEARCH 'SEAN DAINTY' ONLINE
at golfmanagement.online for the full story



CLEARWATER WASH RECYCLING SYSTEMS AT GROUNDSFEST 2026

ClearWater Wash Recycling Systems will showcase its sustainable wash water recycling and chemical storage solutions at GroundsFest 2026, giving grounds care professionals the opportunity to see practical, compliant systems designed to reduce environmental impact and improve operational efficiency.

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



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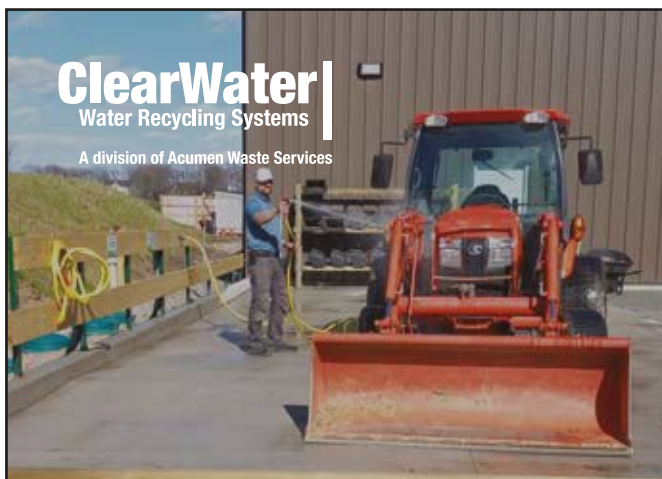
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ANDREW JOHNSTON

GENERAL MANAGER, SENTOSA GOLF CLUB



Andrew Johnston's career in golf began not with a swing, but with a landscape.

Growing up at the Broadmoor Resort in Colorado Springs, where his father played and his grandfather worked as executive chef, Andy – as he prefers to be called – spent his childhood wandering the fairways rather than learning the game.

He remembers those early days vividly: "I fell in love with the golf course, not with the game of golf," and that distinction would shape everything that followed.

By the age of 14 he already knew he wanted to be a golf course architect, and by 15 he was working at a course in Albuquerque cleaning clubs and parking carts. The following season he moved into maintenance, beginning a lifelong relationship with turf, soil and the craft of course building.

His professional break came through superintendent Kevin Adams, who later joined Arnold Palmer's construction arm. Johnston followed him, earning degrees in architecture and turfgrass science before joining Palmer Course Design full time. Those early years were formative.

He worked on dozens of Palmer projects around the world, learning the discipline of construction, the nuance of shaping, and the values Palmer expected of his team.

"The values that he had because of what his father gave him were very strong values that bled out in all of us. Things such as if you're not five minutes early for a meeting, you're late and how you dress and how you act," recalls Johnston.

"They meant something to him and those values drive the things that I do today."

Johnston's rise within the organisation was rapid. At 25 he was sent to Australia as project manager for Sanctuary Cove, the only Arnold Palmer course ever built in the country.

"It was the summer I grew up," he says, reflecting on the responsibility of leading a major project at such a young age. He shaped greens, led construction teams, and learned how to translate design intent into the finished article.

After a decade with Palmer, Johnston moved into agronomy full time, taking on the role of Director of Agronomy at Kraft Farms in Alabama, overseeing 54 holes and a vast sod farm. But design remained a constant pull, with Gene Bates eventually recruiting him as VP of Design, telling him, "I need a guy like you who knows design, knows construction and knows agronomy."

Johnston helped Bates deliver around 70 projects, developing a reputation for blending architectural creativity with agronomic precision. But, despite his design credentials, he never pursued ASGCA membership. "My roots are golf course superintendent... I'll maintain that as long as I can," he says.

That dual identity – architect and agronomist – would prove pivotal when Sentosa Golf Club entered the picture.

His relationship with Sentosa began in 2006, almost by accident. He was working in Beijing when a friend called to say the club needed an architect. Greg Norman had already declined.

Johnston flew down the same night, met the chairman, and sketched a deal on a napkin.





"I AM AN AGRONOMIST FROM DAY ONE AND JUST SORT OF FAKE MY WAY THROUGH BEING GM"

Initially he was asked to make minor adjustments to the old Tanjong course, but within six months the club asked him to redesign the Serapong to elevate it into a tournament venue.

"We need to get in the tournament business," they told him. He accepted, and the redesign transformed Serapong into one of Asia's most respected championship courses.

His deeper involvement came in 2010 during the Barclays Singapore Open. Three days before the event, the superintendent resigned. Sentosa called Johnston, who arrived to find algae covered greens and failing equipment.

"I thought, oh my God, I've made a mistake," he admits. But he turned the situation around. By Monday, every green rolled at 13.5 – far beyond anything previously achieved.

"The fastest green speeds the Singapore Open has ever seen is 10... every green was rolling 13.5." The club asked him to stay. He became consultant, then Director of Agronomy, and eventually General Manager.

But as he recalls, he never sought the GM role. "I am an agronomist from day one and just sort of fake my way through being GM," he laughs. But his agronomic background has been transformative.

Under a traditional GM, he argues, Sentosa would never have invested in the \$18 million worth of equipment it now has, nor would the golf course be treated as the club's most valuable asset.

His days begin early and often end late. "I can't wait to wake up every day to get here," he says. Yet he is realistic about the lack of a succession plan.

"You don't ever want to put all those eggs in one basket again... there's too much risk." He has already advised ownership that his role should eventually be split into three: GM, Director of Agronomy, and Architect.

Sentosa's reputation for sustainability is one of Johnston's most significant achievements. The club's water strategy is a standout example. All lakes are rainwater fed; there is no abstraction, no grey water, no external supply.

"It's all pure mother's nature coming down out of the skies," he says. This approach was driven partly by necessity – Singapore's lease renewal cycles require clubs to demonstrate long term environmental

responsibility – and partly by philosophy, as Johnston believes urban environments need golf courses that act as green lungs rather than water hungry liabilities.

Biochar has been another breakthrough at Sentosa. Johnston was one of the first to introduce it to Asia, working with Mirimichi Green, whose funding arm was backed by Justin Timberlake.

"We measured the clip off of every green, every day, and all of a sudden they started growing too much," he recalls. "It didn't happen instantly, but after a couple of months it was like, 'what the heck', so we knew it had to be the biochar."

The measurable outcomes have been striking. "We've reduced our NPK with using things like biochar, 50 to 60 per cent. We've reduced our nematocides by 90 per cent. We've reduced our fungicides by even more."

Sentosa's greens are also built with pore ceramics and carbon rich materials rather than peat, creating dynamic soils that make turf management more resilient and more efficient. "If you've got great soils to start with, you'll win," Johnston explains.

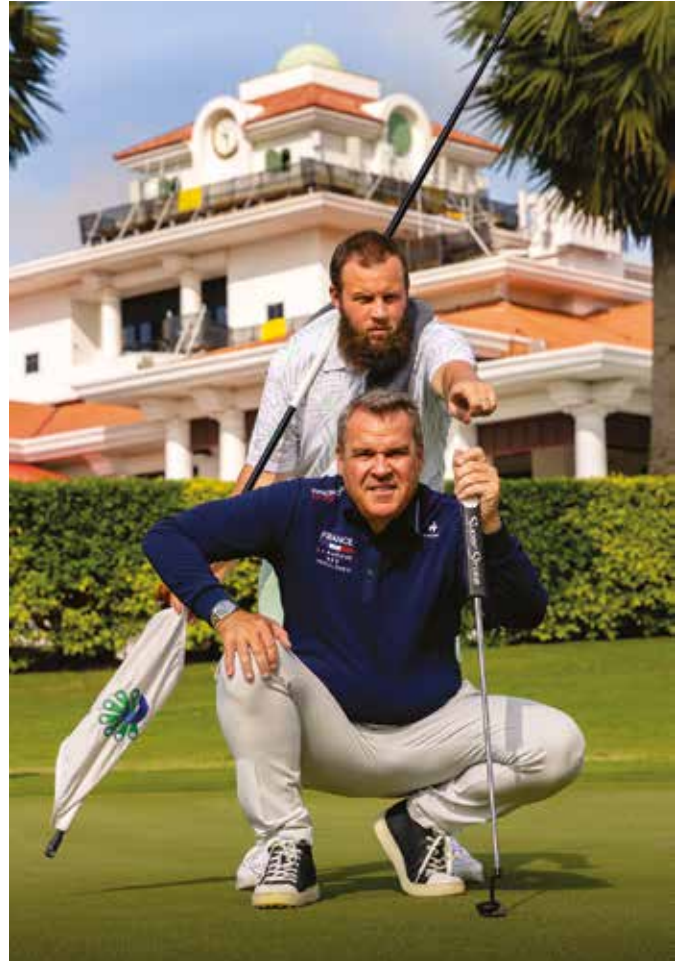
Drainage is another area where Sentosa excels. The course is sand capped to one metre, allowing play to resume within 20 minutes of a 150mm rain event. During one HSBC Women's World Championship, the course absorbed 19 inches of rain and still completed every round on schedule.

"Within 20 minutes we're playing golf... 19 inches of rain... finished every round in regulation," he boasts.

Johnston remains the first person on property each morning, though he is now consciously stepping back to give new superintendent Brett Saggus the space to lead. "If I go down there every morning with him, it just steals his thunder," he says.

He sees himself increasingly as a coach rather than a hands on agronomist, and at 62, he is already thinking about the next phase. When he eventually steps down as GM, he plans to return full time to design under his newly renamed practice, Twisted Earth Golf Design – a nod to the shapers he once worked with under Gene Bates.

"I really like the idea of Twisted Earth," he says, and hopes to continue designing for as long as possible. "I hope I die designing golf courses," he smiles, although hopefully not before he's completed a few more. **END**



"VERDURA RESORT IS EXACTLY THE CALIBRE OF DESTINATION
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VERDURA RESORT
SICILY

Verdura Resort, a Rocco Forte hotel on Sicily's unspoilt southern coast, has been officially welcomed into worldclass.golf, the exclusive portfolio of the world's premier golf destinations. The announcement underlines Verdura's status as one of Europe's most complete golf resorts and further strengthens Sicily's reputation as a leading destination for luxury golf travel.

Set across 230 hectares of Mediterranean coastline near Sciacca, Verdura Resort combines five-star hospitality, panoramic sea views and a world-class golf offering. Its two 18-hole championship courses, East Links and West Shore, were designed by Kyle Phillips and are complemented by a nine-hole par-three course, extensive practice facilities and a state-of-the-art Performance Centre.

Membership in worldclass.golf is reserved for destinations that demonstrate exceptional standards in course architecture, conditioning, hospitality and the overall visitor experience. Verdura Resort's inclusion places it alongside a carefully curated collection of celebrated golf venues across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and the Americas.

"Verdura Resort is exactly the calibre of destination we created worldclass.golf to represent," said Michael Lenihan, CEO of worldclass.golf. "From the quality of the golf courses and the beauty of the Mediterranean setting to the level of service delivered throughout the resort, Verdura offers a visitor experience that is genuinely world-class."

Verdura has long been regarded as a benchmark for golf in Italy, with its links-style courses shaped by coastal breezes, strategic bunkering and fast, carefully contoured greens. Beyond the fairways, guests can enjoy refined accommodation, an award-winning spa, multiple restaurants and bars, private beach access, tennis, padel and a broad programme of curated resort experiences.

Lenihan added: "What makes Verdura stand out is the way the resort brings together championship golf, authentic Sicilian hospitality and a strong sense of place. It is not simply a venue with outstanding courses; it is a complete destination where every part of the journey, from arrival to post-round relaxation, has been considered in detail."

With its inclusion in worldclass.golf, Verdura is set to reach an even wider international audience of discerning golfers seeking exceptional hospitality and memorable experiences. **END**





Words Michael Lenihan
Online shuralinks.com

JON BROOK

GENERAL MANAGER, SHURA LINKS



SHURA LINKS

Jon Brook's golf career has been shaped by movement – across continents, cultures, and the changing expectations of an industry transformed.

Today, as General Manager of Shura Links, Saudi Arabia's first island resort golf course, Brook sits at the centre of one of the world's most ambitious golf developments.

The role draws on three decades in the game: leadership, technical expertise, commercial instinct, and team building in unfamiliar environments.

"I've built an international career in golf spanning more than 30 years," he says, reflecting on a journey that has taken him from PGA Professional to senior leadership roles across Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

"I've consistently driven commercial growth, elevated member and guest experiences, and led high performing teams. My career has combined established private clubs with luxury resort developments, culminating in my current role with Red Sea Global."

That culmination is Shura Links, an island course connected by bridges and positioned as the flagship golf asset within Red Sea Global's vast tourism vision.

For Brook, the attraction was immediate. "First and foremost, it was the scale and ambition of Red Sea Global's vision," he recollects.

"The opportunity to be involved from the beginning of a landmark project – helping shape Saudi Arabia's first island resort golf course – was a compelling challenge professionally and personally."

He arrived during the pre opening phase, and recalls: "One of the key challenges was building a fully operational golf facility from the ground up in a remote island environment," he explains.

"This involved coordinating stakeholders, logistics, procurement, systems, infrastructure, and staffing within tight timelines."

Recruitment was another priority. Brook knew Shura Links would depend on its culture from day one. "It was essential to establish a high performing team and embed service standards from the start," he says.

"At the same time, aligning the golf operation with the wider Red Sea vision and integrating seamlessly with luxury hotel partners added another layer of complexity."

Now that the course is open, Brook sees the finished product as a faithful realisation of the original vision.

"The early design drawings have been delivered exactly as planned and to the highest standards," he says, crediting Brian Curley and Richard Haas for creating a visually striking, strategically rich course.

"They have delivered one of the finest golf courses in the region."

Shura Links – which is managed by Golf Saudi – is, in Brook's words, "a links in name, style and how it plays."

Hard, fast surfaces, large undulating greens, deep bunkers and sloped run offs define the experience. The ever present Red Sea wind is a strategic force.

"Being a seaside course, the wind plays an important role in the playability of the course, just like it would at any traditional links," he says.



"TRAINING AND DEVELOPING SAUDI NATIONALS IS A KEY PRIORITY AND AN INTEGRAL PART OF VISION 2030"

Asked to choose his favourite holes, Brook resists. "It's difficult to say as they are all different and unique," he says. Visitors gravitate to the seaside holes – 4, 5, 6 and 15 – but 13 holes feature the Red Sea in some form, each serving the course's flow and playability."

The course's future includes the possibility of professional tournaments, though Brook is measured in his outlook.

"Shura Island is such a unique destination, unlike anything else in the world," he says. "Brian has designed a course that suits recreational golfers and the best professionals under tournament conditions. Should the opportunity be available, it would be a great honour for us."

Sustainability is central to Shura Links, driven by necessity as much as principle. Water scarcity demands innovation, as too does drought tolerant turf as Brook explains: "The Paspalum TE we used is far more efficient in terms of water consumption and is better suited to the heat, salinity, and overall conditions we face.

"From a playability perspective, it offers firmer, faster surfaces with more ball roll and a greater emphasis on strategy."

Irrigation uses treated sewage effluent and potable water, monitored daily for salinity. "We use a brand new, state of the art Toro Lynx irrigation system which controls more than 2,500 sprinkler heads," Brook explains. "This ensures we use water as efficiently as possible while maintaining optimal playing conditions."

Beyond water, sustainability extends to energy use and environmental protection.

"There is a strong focus on energy efficiency, including renewable energy and smart systems," he says. The course is carefully integrated into the landscape to minimise impact and support biodiversity.

Technology plays a major role in both maintenance and the guest experience, with Shura Links joining worldclass.golf as a Premium Destination earlier this year.

"Our Toro Lynx system is fully app controlled," Brook says. "We complement this with POGO moisture tracking on our greens."

On the player side, Club Car carts equipped with Visage GPS provide yardages, communication, and soon food and beverage ordering.

"Our fully integrated booking platform allows guests to seamlessly package their golf, hotel stay, and transfers in one simple journey," stated Brook.

The practice facilities include a 350 metre full grass range, large putting green, short game area, and undulating putting course. The Foster + Partners clubhouse is equally distinctive – four buildings resembling the petals of a native flower.

"We have the main clubhouse restaurant, an outside bar, swimming pool, private beach area, locker rooms, a gym and a prayer rooms," Brook says.

The team behind Shura Links is compact but experienced. "We have 66 full time employees," he says. "The team is split into Operations, Agronomy, Finance, HR, IT, Marketing, HSSE and Facilities Maintenance, and the staff is international, reflecting the global nature of the project."

Hiring has focused on building a strong core while developing local talent. "It's about balancing proven expertise with long term development," Brook says.

"Training and developing Saudi nationals is a key priority and an integral part of Vision 2030. We are committed to creating clear pathways for progression."

Membership will exist, but the resort's hotels will drive much of the traffic. "There will be a carefully structured membership offering," he says. "But it will be balanced alongside a strong focus on resort guests, with a seamless end to end experience."

Growing the game among Saudi nationals is another priority. Shura Links has partnered with the local school to deliver after-school coaching for children aged four to 12, while also offering complimentary introductory golf sessions for Saudi guests who want to try the game for the first time.

This initiative runs alongside Golf Saudi's national Go Golf programme, which provides free coaching opportunities for all new Saudi golfers across the Kingdom.

For Brook, Shura Links is both a career milestone and a platform for future growth, drawing on three decades in the industry while pushing him into new territory.

"The chance to help shape a destination that will sit on the global stage," he says, "has been an incredible honour."

And with the course now open, the next chapter begins. **END**

MARK SANDERSON

CLUB MANAGER, BEDLINGTONSHIRE GOLF CLUB



After acquiring an appetite for golf playing pitch-and-putt on a family holiday in Keswick, and then applying substantial natural talent, Mark Sanderson did not waste any time in getting to a low single-figure handicap by his mid-teens.

Nor did the now 34-year-old let the grass grow under his feet before taking the first step on his journey to becoming Bedlingtonshire Golf Club's club manager – starting full-time work within 24 hours of his final day at school.

"When I collected my grades for my GCSEs from the high school, a teacher said, 'So what are you going to study when you come back in September?' He was taken aback when I said, 'I'm not coming back. I'm starting my job tomorrow.'"

At the time he had memberships at both his original club, Longhirst, and Bedlingtonshire, each of which was no more than five miles from home. At 15, Sanderson had also been quick off the mark when he overheard in the Longhirst pro shop that a sudden departure had left them short-staffed for the following morning.

"I knew Graham Chambers, the director of golf, well enough to say, 'I'll do it. I haven't got a clue what I'm doing, but I will help you. I'll sit in there and do anything you tell me to do'. The shop literally just had a fridge in; we didn't have anything in the shop because the guy just left. But the shop was built up from there. It was a really good journey."

The youngster had been on several junior squad trips to The Open, organised by Chambers and Sanderson's father, but, as skilful as he was, these did not inspire the

teenager to dream of a future as a tournament professional. But he did already know he wanted a future in golf.

His sense of responsibility and his diligence meant that Chambers, whose multiple roles at Longhirst included running the junior section, offered Sanderson the chance to take on the role of trainee manager at just 16.

In 2011 he was alerted to head professional Marcus Webb's need for an assistant professional at Bedlingtonshire, and landed the role, subsequently gaining full PGA qualifications. The next obvious step would have appeared to be to gain experience at assistant's level before seeking a post as head professional, but he was wary of its limitations.

"The PGA landscape is a little bit different now, but when I qualified you had 300 people per year qualifying, and that is year on year. You often see assistant professionals who never go beyond that point.

"I felt that if I was going to make an impact at a golf club, I was not going to do that from an assistant pro's position. I felt I should branch out and get into more of an administrative role, long term a manager's role, and I would always have the PGA qualification to fall back on."

Sanderson's admirable work ethic shines through; before starting full-time work at 16, besides his role in the pro shop at Longhirst he also washed cars, and briefly had a paper round, to earn the money for first a scooter and then a car.

But at this point of our interview it is his enthusiasm for being able to achieve his







"I FELT THAT IF I WAS GOING TO MAKE AN IMPACT AT A GOLF CLUB, I WAS NOT GOING TO DO THAT FROM AN ASSISTANT PRO'S POSITION"

goal of moving the needle at club level that dominates as he describes being involved in the great strides made at Bedlingtonshire during his first four years as club manager.

On-course enhancements have involved better tee irrigation, improved drainage, and the laying of recycled strips of 3G football pitches onto paths leading away from tees, particularly those subject to damage during winter, when traffic remains busy.

Off-course the club have built a Trackman iO studio, a putting studio, and changed protocols to make the pro shop Bedlingtonshire's front of house, so that queries about, for example, memberships or society group bookings do not automatically get deflected towards office management.

"We did a members' survey, which gave us quite an insight from the members' perspective, but there was frustration from my side as well, which I shared with the board. That is how we came up with a plan as to how we were going to address certain areas.

"It was simple things, but things which cost a lot of money, like tee irrigation. We saw areas of the greens' drainage failing – it was 50 years old – and you would have areas of the green that would just pool water a little bit.

"We had to plan effectively so that we could afford it because we are not cash rich. Our membership fee is £825 plus the affiliation fee; we are a very reputable golf course, we host county championships and things like that, and the county enjoy coming here."

With membership income much lower than at many adjacent clubs, but operating costs very similar, Sanderson says, "it is the surplus which gets really nipped away." But historical reluctance to embark on projects they felt were unaffordable have been assuaged by the club's affordable long-term approach to the work.

"The members are seeing the benefits, physical improvements. Some of the tees which were really dry last year are really green now, which is fantastic."

The proposal to invest £35,000 in the Trackman studio was also met with some initial opposition, but the recalcitrants were quickly won over.

"When they were going in initially it was a case of, 'why are we spending £35,000 on a swing room when we could have spent that on the course?', but it was about the revenue coming in over a period of time.

"Our green fee intake for the whole year is about £75,000, so when you compare that to bigger clubs, they are taking in considerably more than clubs similar to ourselves in the North East. They're driving a lot of commercial and corporate revenue, but we are very focused around the member, so have a very reasonable fee set.

"If we even increase our intake around £25,000 a year through the swing room then that just goes back into the golf course. It has also meant that we have been able to get new pro shop staff, and a new head pro in Jonathan Levey. They teach, they do junior coaching all winter, and the spinoffs from having that studio have been significant, so it was a massive step in the right direction.

"Retailers rocketed because of the Trackman studio, and the impact of the putting studio has been phenomenal. We have sold more putters this year than in the previous four years combined."

Sanderson – who was awarded Fellow Manager status with the PGA in March – says he is indebted to the guidance and encouragement from both Chambers and Webb that helped shape his career.

He runs the junior section, with the help of a lady member, and uses much of his spare time to attend as many of their events as he can, his way of paying forward all the help he got when starting out in golf.

His spare time will shrink considerably come November as he and partner Sarah are expecting their first child. Fatherhood might therefore apply a touch of the brakes to both his love of mountain biking, and to an attempt to play more golf than in recent years.

"I had probably been down to about four rounds for the whole year. I bought some new equipment this year, just to try and get the bug back a little bit. I'll tell you what I have enjoyed, I have enjoyed playing badly because it's given me something to practise over the winter, practise in a Trackman bay, get out there in the evening time when there's no one around.

"I've enjoyed the challenge of actually starting to learn golf again."

Although not as much as he will enjoy learning for the first time the skills of, and experiencing the delights attached to, being a parent. "Aye, this winter is going to be pretty full on, I imagine," he says, with an unmistakable smile in his voice. **END**



RYAN DODDS

HEAD OF GOLF MANAGEMENT, HERITAGE GOLF CLUB



On the southern coast of Mauritius, where volcanic ridges fall towards sugar cane fields and the Indian Ocean, Ryan Dodds has spent more than a decade reshaping the island's golf identity. To visitors, Heritage Golf Club is now a luxury address with 45 holes, two DP World Tour-hosting courses and a links-style layout at La Réserve Golf Links.

To Dodds, Head of Golf Management and Projects, it is proof of what happens when instinct, discipline and long-term belief meet opportunity.

Dodds' story begins with a player measuring himself against the game. In South Africa, he was good enough to compete, good enough to believe, and honest enough to recognise the gap between promise and greatness. One amateur event alongside Louis Oosthuizen stayed with him.

"I felt I had played excellent golf," Dodds recalls, "yet still finished a long way behind Louis as he went on to win the event. It quickly became apparent that my good and his good were worlds apart."

For some, that realisation might have been bruising. For Dodds, it was clarifying. He did not fall out of love with golf; he changed his angle of attack. "I realised my future in the game was not necessarily going to be inside the ropes," he says.

"But I also knew I loved golf too much to leave it. The business of the game, the way clubs are run, the way destinations are built — that became the part that really excited me."

That shift has defined his career. A Fellow Member of the PGA of South Africa with more than two decades in the industry,

Dodds has worked across teaching, retail, club management, event commercialisation and destination marketing.

When he arrived in Mauritius in 2012, he brought a South African professionals energy to an island better known for honeymoons than handicaps.

"I am so excited to be here," he said soon after taking up the role at Heritage Golf Club. "The people are very welcoming and friendly... we have an exceptional golf course with world-class facilities and five-star service to top it all off. It really is a winning combination."

The phrase could have sounded like easy optimism. In hindsight, it reads like intent. Mauritius already had beauty, hospitality and climate. What it lacked was a global golf identity: the sense that people would travel there not for beaches with golf attached, but because the golf itself demanded the journey.

Dodds saw the gap. "Mauritius was always special," he says. "But for golf travellers, special scenery is not enough. You need quality, consistency, service, tournament credibility and a reason for serious golfers to say: I have to play there."

The clearest expression of that ambition is La Réserve Golf Links, co-designed by Louis Oosthuizen and Peter Matkovich and opened as the first contemporary links course in the Indian Ocean. It is muscular, exposed and cinematic, with elevated greens, rolling fairways and ocean views from first tee to final putt.

"From the beginning, the idea was never to build just another course," Dodds says.

"AT LA RÉSERVE GOLF LINKS, THE PRIORITY IS TO KEEP THE PLAYING EXPERIENCE PURE, AUTHENTIC AND CHALLENGING"

"It had to give Mauritius something authentic in golf terms, something that could stand up on the international stage."

That international stage arrived quickly, with La Réserve joining worldclass.golf in 2022 – under the stewardship of former GM, Jonathan Menteath – and behind that success sat a difficult delivery story.

A second course had long been part of the Heritage Resorts & Golf masterplan, driven by demand at Le Château Golf Course and a desire to reposition Bel Ombre internationally.

Then came the pandemic, delays and global tourism uncertainty. "Projects like this test everyone," Dodds says. "You need belief from ownership, patience from investors, resilience from the team and a clear understanding that the reward is long term. If you only look at the next quarter, you do not build something like La Réserve."

In person, Dodds comes across less as a flamboyant impresario than as a systems thinker with a golfer's impatience for sloppy execution. He talks about yield management, agronomy and guest experience with intensity. Island life, he insists, has never meant an easy life.

"People imagine managing golf in Mauritius is all sunshine and slow days," he says. "The reality is that we operate inside a serious corporate and hospitality environment. Standards are high, governance is high, expectations are high. The setting is beautiful, but the work is demanding."

That is why he deflects credit towards the wider team. Heritage Golf Club's 45-hole operation depends on specialist leaders and a large local workforce delivering the detail guests remember. "Effective executive management is not about making every operational call," Dodds says.

"It is about creating clarity, removing friction and protecting standards. You give good people responsibility, and then you make sure they have the support to succeed."

The same philosophy has shaped the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open, the tournament Dodds helped conceptualise and commercialise as the first tri-sanctioned event involving the European, Asian and Sunshine Tours. It has become a showcase for Mauritius and its operational talent.

More than 90 percent of the delivery team is local, and local officials now form part of the rules operation.

"That is one of the things I am most proud of," Dodds says. "It is not sustainable if you fly in expertise every year and leave nothing behind. The real legacy is when Mauritians are running world-class events, developing careers and showing what can be done here."

Legacy is a word Dodds approaches cautiously. He has heard the "Mr Golf in Mauritius" label, and accepts it with embarrassment and gratitude. "It is very flattering," he says, "but it is not a title I would ever give myself."

Still, the description exists for a reason. In 2018, he helped establish The Golf Company with the Rogers Group, building a platform spanning club operations, golf tours, retail, product distribution and development projects across the island and wider Indian Ocean. The work has made him a connector: between owners and operators, golfers and resorts, local talent and international standards.

Dodds remains protective of golf's traditional difficulty. At a time when the industry courts new audiences through technology, shorter formats and entertainment-led products, he argues that premium golf cannot lose its soul. Booking systems, data and personalisation have their place, but the course must still ask proper questions.

"At Heritage Golf Club, particularly at La Réserve Golf Links, the priority is to keep the playing experience pure, authentic and challenging," he says. "Golf is aspirational because it asks something of you. If you remove that, you remove part of what makes the game worth travelling for."

That conviction may be the clearest thread running through his career. Dodds wants golf that justifies its landscape, rewards its people and earns its place in the global conversation. Mauritius, once perceived mainly as a tropical escape with a handful of pleasant resort courses, now has a sharper claim: it is an island where championship golf, luxury hospitality and local capability can meet at the highest level.

For Dodds, the achievement is not a finish line. It is a platform. "If people associate me with helping grow golf in Mauritius, then I take that as a wonderful compliment," he says. "But it is not about me."

"It is about making a difference, creating opportunities and proving that this island belongs in the conversation with the best golf destinations in the world." **END**



PORTMARNOCK RESORT & JAMESON GOLF LINKS

PORTMARNOCK.COM

Words Roddy Williams

Location Dublin, Ireland

Portmarnock Golf Club has spent decades being discussed as one of the great links courses not to have hosted The Open. Now that conversation appears closer than ever to becoming reality.

In July, The R&A chief executive Mark Darbon said discussions around taking golf's oldest championship to Portmarnock Golf Club were "getting pretty close", following extensive feasibility work involving the club, local authorities and the Irish Government.

Should the plan come to fruition, Portmarnock Golf Club would become the first venue outside the United Kingdom to stage The Open Championship.

For golfers planning a visit to Ireland – and Dublin in particular – that prospect adds another reason to explore a stretch of coastline that already contains some of the country's best links golf.

And one of the most practical places from which to do so sits next door.



Portmarnock Resort & Jameson Golf Links occupies the same historic peninsula, overlooking Velvet Strand. Dublin Airport is around 20 minutes away, the city centre approximately half an hour, while a growing golf concierge operation helps visiting golfers piece everything together.

That responsibility falls to Golf Sales Manager Niall Carbery and Golf Sales & Tour Coordinator Daniel Yeates.

Working under Director of Golf Paul McCanny, the pair help create itineraries combining golf, accommodation, transport, dining and time away from the course.

For Yeates, the concierge service begins well before anyone reaches Portmarnock.

"From the first email," is how he describes it. That initial contact can lead to considerably more than booking 'just' a room and tee time.

The team can arrange caddies, rental clubs and club shipping, organise airport and course transfers, book restaurants and spa treatments, and advise on places to visit.

For groups playing several courses, the job becomes more complicated while inevitable changes need to be dealt with without disrupting the rest of the trip.

Yeates says the starting point is understanding the people travelling.

"It is all based around getting to know the group, what their idea of a good time is and really going from there."

Requests can stretch to helicopters and private jets, although he says that after working in golf travel for a while, very little feels unusual. The fundamentals are less glamorous: attention to detail, communication and getting the timings right.





"IT IS ALL BASED AROUND GETTING TO KNOW THE GROUP, WHAT THEIR IDEA OF A GOOD TIME IS AND REALLY GOING FROM THERE"

His route into golf was unconventional. After leaving school he started an air-conditioning apprenticeship before moving into banking, where he spent eight years working in mortgages. The aftermath of Covid-19 presented an opportunity to change direction and enter the golf industry.

Carbery's career has developed within Portmarnock Resort itself. A former competitive GAA and tennis player who also represented Ireland in sailing, he initially worked in health insurance before returning to college in the evenings to study business and marketing.

He joined Jameson Golf Links while studying and has progressed from the golf shop through reservations and sales to his current management role.

After more than 11 years at the resort, that experience gives him a detailed understanding of both the product and the practicalities of selling Irish golf. It also means he has watched the market change.

Carbery points to Royal Portrush hosting The Open in 2019 and 2025, Ireland's growing profile among North American golfers and the return of the Ryder Cup in 2027 as important drivers of golf tourism.

For Portmarnock Resort & Jameson Golf Links, geography helps. Alongside its proximity to Dublin Airport and the capital, there is an unusual concentration of links courses within striking distance.

Jameson Golf Links is an exceptional modern links while Portmarnock Golf Club, The Island and Royal Dublin can all form part of an itinerary, with County Louth another option farther north. More ambitious day trips can extend to Royal County Down.

The resort has already packaged that principle into its Ultimate Irish Jameson Golf Links Experience, combining six nights at Portmarnock with golf at Jameson Golf Links and a selection of Portmarnock Golf Club, The Island, County Louth and Royal Dublin.

Trinity College, the historic Jameson Distillery and a whiskey tasting at the resort's Sabin Pub provide reasons to put the clubs away for a few hours, with transfers also incorporated.

Jameson Golf Links itself has changed substantially. Originally designed by Bernhard Langer in 1995, the course recently underwent a renovation led by architect Jeff Lynch of (re)GOLF.

Tees and greens were raised to make more of the coastal setting and views across Velvet Strand, Ireland's Eye, Howth Head and Lambay, while much of the closing ten holes was remodelled.

There is considerably more history beneath the redesign. The resort occupies land once belonging to the Jameson family, whose St Marnocks House, dating from 1847, now forms part of the hotel.

John Jameson established a private golf course on the property in the 1850s for family and friends, and three members of the family are buried beside what is now the first hole.

The prospect of The Open arriving next door would inevitably raise the profile of the area further. If Portmarnock joins the rota, golfers staying at the resort would have one of Ireland's newest-look links on site and an Open venue immediately alongside it.

Before then comes another significant year for Irish golf, with the Ryder Cup returning to Ireland at Adare Manor in September 2027, 21 years after the country last staged the matches at The K Club.

For international visitors turning the Ryder Cup into a longer Irish golf holiday, several days around Dublin before or after travelling to County Limerick presents an obvious opportunity.

Golf travel has become more complicated as tee sheets at Ireland's leading courses have filled. Carbery argues that relationships with clubs, tour operators, restaurants, pubs and other suppliers are consequently an important part of the job.

Personal contacts can help when plans change, while detailed knowledge of courses and travelling times matters when a group is trying to fit several sought-after rounds into one visit.

Yeates believes demand for that type of service will continue to grow, in part because golfers talk to one another: "If friends start chatting that they had a great trip with no worries, then it will spread around and people will look for that service more often."

With the prospect of Open Championship golf next door, there should be no shortage of reasons for those conversations to start.

For Portmarnock Resort, however, the proposition remains relatively simple: the golf brings people to Ireland; the location allows them to see more of it; and the team makes the pieces fit together. **END**





Words David Wheatley

Online ecobunker.co.uk

RICHARD ALLEN

FOUNDER, ECOBUNKER



Richard Allen never set out to become a bunker expert. But when his engineer's brain and love for the game of golf combined, the practical challenges faced by golf courses became set firmly in his sights.

Whether tackling erosion and sand contamination, devising ways to reduce maintenance costs or helping clubs withstand increasingly extreme weather, Allen's approach has always been rooted in solving real problems for greenkeeping teams.

Today, EcoBunker products are installed at over 300 courses in the UK, and following a rapid expansion across the globe, more than 200 of the world's most prestigious golfing destinations work with the company and its network of international partners.

"We've never developed products simply because they're different," Allen explains. "Everything we've created has come from listening to golf clubs and understanding the problems they're trying to solve.

"That's just my engineering brain in action, trying to find simple solutions to real life problems. As we've expanded internationally, we've found those challenges vary from country to country, but there is always a solution that we can develop.

"The British climate was really the catalyst," he says. "But what started as a response to erosion and repeated rebuilding has become incredibly relevant in countries facing hurricanes, cyclones and extreme rainfall.

"In places like Florida or South-East Asia, a single storm can destroy conventional bunker edges overnight so the protection we give is very significant.

"Having said that, we have seen just this year an extraordinary tidal event at Hayling Island Golf Club where the only thing left undamaged in their practice area after the tide broke the boundaries of the course, was our EcoBunker."

In answer to changing pressures on golf clubs, product development has remained central to the company's growth. Most recently, the introduction of factory pre-cut tiles has transformed installation efficiency and brought multiple benefits to site teams.

"It sounds like a relatively small innovation," Allen admits, "but an EcoBunker can require between 750 and 10,000 tiles, so eliminating on-site cutting saves a huge amount of time. Those savings extend well beyond installation speed though.

"Without the need to cut every tile by hand, greenkeeping teams avoid repeatedly handling and wetting materials, while removing the risks associated with using Stanley knives throughout the construction process."

"In many cases contractors and golf club staff are reporting installation times reduced by around 50 per cent," says Allen. "The factory-cut tiles are also perfectly consistent, which improves the finished appearance while making the whole process safer and more efficient."

Pre-cut tiles have also reduced material wastage, while the labour savings have proved particularly attractive for clubs operating with smaller maintenance teams. Unsurprisingly, Allen says demand for the pre-cut system has rapidly overtaken the original product with 90 per cent of customers now requesting pre-cut.



"OUR REINFORCED EDGING STABILISES THE BUNKER PROFILE, PREVENTS EROSION AND DRAMATICALLY REDUCES SAND CONTAMINATION"

Although EcoBunker has become synonymous with dramatic revetted bunker faces, Allen believes one of the company's biggest achievements has been demonstrating the flexibility of the technology across very different styles of golf course.

"People naturally associate us with re-vetted bunkers," he says. "But we've spent years adapting the system for completely different architectural styles, construction techniques and agronomic conditions."

"Our reinforced edging stabilises the bunker profile, prevents erosion and dramatically reduces sand contamination," Allen explains. "You can have that as a huge revetted face, or as an invisible low edge. Whatever the needs of your course there is a solution that delivers all the benefits of synthetic bunker edging."

"These bespoke solutions are becoming increasingly important and really set us apart as a business. Whatever success looks like for a client, we have the in-house expertise to design a solution that will meet their very specific needs."

Innovation at EcoBunker has extended well beyond bunker edging. Five years ago, the company introduced EcoTec, its own proprietary bunker liner, after struggling to find an existing product that met the performance requirements of modern golf courses while remaining commercially accessible.

"We identified what clubs actually wanted from a bunker liner," Allen explains. "It needed to be affordable, simple to install, capable of holding sand on steep faces and forgiving enough that golfers (or their clubs) wouldn't be injured if they occasionally reached the liner."

"While affordability was one of the criteria we started with, we've actually developed one of the best liners on the market, so good in fact it's been installed at some of the very best courses including Kingsbarns, Woodhall Spa, Foxhills, Hanbury Manor and Beau Desert."

And the company's product portfolio continues to expand through its UK distribution partnership with LOKSAND, a soil stabilisation system designed for high-traffic areas around the golf course.

"LOKSAND adds a whole new dimension to our bespoke bunker solutions. The strength it creates is remarkable while maintaining a completely natural finish," says Allen.

"It's ideal for cart paths, bunker surrounds, high-wear areas or even bunker edging where EcoBunker isn't necessarily the right fit. I first encountered it during a construction project in Asia and was amazed to see heavy machinery operating right up to bunker edges without causing damage."

The first UK project that has incorporated LOKSAND is at the world renowned Hotchkiss course at Woodhall Spa, where three different EcoBunker technologies have been combined in a truly unique solution that has been a real highlight for the team.

"Keeping true to Tom Doak's re-design and philosophy was our number one priority. We needed to lock in that design for years to come, eliminate erosion and stone ingress while not altering the original aesthetic."

"We devised a very low synthetic edge that is invisible in the finished bunker. That edge meets with a full EcoTec bunker liner creating a completely sealed unit that is erosion free and keeps out all contamination from below," continued Allen.

"We then used LOKSAND on the bunker surrounds to ensure that in high traffic areas there was no crumbling or particles coming off the edge causing erosion and contamination in the bunkers."

Without LOKSAND we would not have got the same results, so I'm delighted that we could incorporate this remarkable product into our solution."

EcoBunker's journey has been underpinned by one man's pursuit of the simplest answer to the challenges faced at golf courses. That ability to problem solve has helped to create a business that not only has some of the most effective product solutions on the market, but has the ability to combine products and expertise to deliver unique solutions for every client.

Examples such as the recent installation at Woodhall Spa simply serve to highlight the ability to deliver engineering excellence with technical products that can't be matched elsewhere.

As clubs continue to balance performance, budgets, environmental responsibility and the changing challenges of extreme weather events, every club has a different set of problems that need to be answered.

With products, expertise and innovation at the heart of everything it does, EcoBunker, and Richard Allen are ready to meet those challenges head on. **END**

ROBOTICS HELP RECLAIM TIME FOR ADDITIONAL ON COURSE MAINTENANCE TASKS



As adoption of autonomous mowing grows globally across golf, its value in giving skilled course management teams more time to improve the courses in their care is becoming increasingly clear.

For generations, mowing has been one of the defining activities of golf course maintenance. It is relentlessly repetitive and yet essential to the presentation and playability of any course. It is also enormously demanding of time, machinery and people.

That combination is prompting a growing number of golf venues to reassess how large areas of turf are maintained. Autonomous mowing is now being integrated into everyday operations across fairways, semi-rough, and increasingly complex areas of golf courses.

The shift is not simply about replacing one type of mower with another. It represents a broader change in how course managers allocate labour, schedule work, and balance presentation standards against financial and environmental pressures.

At the centre of the approach is a relatively simple principle: mowing little and often. Robotic mowers work regularly within digitally defined boundaries, with the result being they consistently remove small amounts of grass on each pass.

For the golfer, the most noticeable outcome may be greater consistency. For the greenkeeping team, the more important benefit is often the time released for work that cannot be automated.

That distinction is crucial. Robotics are not a substitute for skilled greenkeepers. Turf management remains highly special-

ised, shaped by agronomy, irrigation, plant health, machinery, construction, weather, and course conditions. Autonomous mowing can, however, take on some of the most repetitive work.

The experience of The Point at Polzeath in Cornwall offers a useful illustration of how that can work in practice.

The objective was to produce a consistently strong golf course while operating with realistic staffing levels and managing the challenges of staff turnover. The Point has now had its full autonomous fleet operating for almost 12 months, using four Husqvarna CEORA mowers across larger, wider areas and several Automower 580 units on steeper, more undulating ground.

The most telling results are not confined to how much grass the machines have cut.

"We've halved our fuel bill and we've halved our parts bill," explains Head Greenkeeper Tom Collings (pictured). "Prices were going up so high that we were less able to do the things that actually improve the golf course. We were spending so much on simply maintaining a consistent level."

At The Point, the answer has been a significant increase in agronomic work.

"In just a season, I've gained 500 hours of aerating, spraying and the cultural practices that I now have time to do," says Collings. "That allows us to present the course to a high standard consistently throughout the year."

Those 500 hours show where robotics may deliver most value. A machine can follow a mapped route and maintain a defined cutting height, but it cannot identify turf





"IN JUST A SEASON, I'VE GAINED 500 HOURS OF AERATING, SPRAYING AND THE CULTURAL PRACTICES THAT I NOW HAVE TIME TO DO"

stress, manage moisture, repair wear, improve drainage, or choose the right cultural treatment. By taking routine mowing out of the daily workload, autonomous systems can give that expertise more room to make a difference.

There are also potential advantages in when and how maintenance takes place. Conventional mowing must usually be coordinated around tee sheets, competitions, weather, and daylight, often creating a narrow window in which teams can work.

Autonomous mowers can operate at quieter times, including overnight where conditions and site protocols permit. That can reduce interaction with golfers and allow surfaces to be freshly prepared by the time the greenkeepers arrive for work.

"You haven't got a greenkeeper driving up and down on a loud mower," Collings explains. "It's now all done quietly, generally at night."

At The Point, Collings has seen changes both in the turf and in the definition of the maintained areas.

"You get better definition and better turf consistently. The sward is much thicker, so it's been a total game-changer," he said.

Consistency is especially relevant during rapid growth, when a stretched team can quickly move from one urgent mowing task to the next. Once configured, robots can continue working to schedule while the team responds elsewhere.

They can also extend the practical mowing season. Lighter equipment may be able to work in conditions where taking a heavier machine onto the course would risk marking or compacting the ground.

"We can keep the robotic mowers working deeper into the winter and we can get them out quicker," says Collings. "You could turn up on any day of the week now, at any time of year, and the course will be presented to a good standard throughout the 18 holes."

No two golf courses present exactly the same maintenance challenge. Terrain, tree cover, bunkers, water features, narrow access points, and the way different playing areas connect all influence how an autonomous mowing programme should be designed.

That is why installation is not simply a matter of placing machines on the course. Husqvarna's installation teams and Pro

Partner dealer network work with greenkeepers to assess the venue, digitally map its characteristics, and create a bespoke cutting programme.

Virtual boundaries allow working areas to be defined precisely, while separate cutting heights and schedules can be assigned to fairways, semi-rough and other areas. Stay-out zones and transport paths can also be incorporated, helping machines move safely around bunkers, water features, trees, and course infrastructure.

The programme can then be refined as the team gains experience or requirements change. Cutting schedules can be adjusted around weather, competitions, and periods of increased growth, while digital boundaries can be updated to reflect alterations to fairway shapes or the wider course layout.

This tailored approach means autonomy can be integrated into the existing maintenance strategy rather than forcing the venue to reorganise around the technology.

The greenkeeping team retains control over how, when, and where mowing takes place, supported by specialist installation expertise.

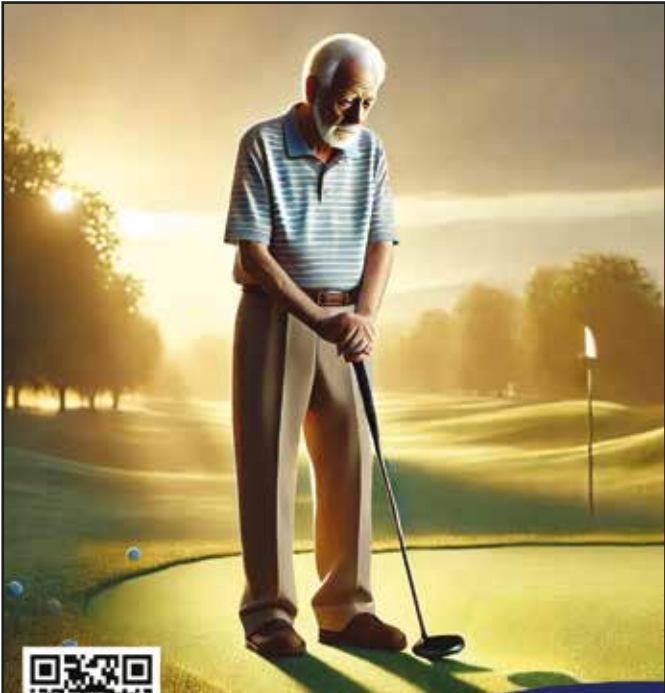
The most effective installations are collaborative, combining the greenkeeping team's knowledge with technical expertise to create a system suited to the course, its standards, and its ambitions.

Yet the wider story is less about any individual machine than the changing role of course maintenance technology.

The value of robotics should not be measured only in acres cut or litres of fuel avoided. It should also be assessed through improvements made possible elsewhere: more aeration, better irrigation management, attention to bunkers and course furniture, and more time spent improving the turf.

For The Point, the result has been a course that can be maintained more consistently without asking skilled employees to spend much of their working day completing repetitive mowing or keeping conventional machines running.

That may be the most persuasive argument for autonomy. Greenkeepers remain central to every successful golf course, but their time is finite. If technology carries more of the routine workload, that time can be invested where their expertise creates greatest value. **END**




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"THERE ARE ALWAYS OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW, TO INNOVATE,
AND TO INTRODUCE MOTOCADDY TO NEW AUDIENCES"



Words

Oliver Churcher
Marketing Director
Motocaddy

GUEST BOOK

OLIVER CHURCHER



When I joined Motocaddy back in June 2006, I remember being enthusiastic, excited and eager to step into the golf industry to work for a brand that was in the early stages of trying to make its mark. Twenty years later, I'm proud to say I have the same passion and drive for what I do. And we definitely made our mark.

Going from a start-up to the UK's top-selling electric trolley brand in little more than four years proved the market was ready for something different. Since then, we've worked hard to change perceptions of the electric trolley category, with a strong focus on styling, innovation and reliability. Today, we've sold products to more than one million golfers worldwide; are present in 40 markets and support more than 3,500 retail partners.

But there are always opportunities to grow, to innovate, and to introduce Motocaddy to new audiences. We launched in Australia last year, having already successfully expanded into North America in 2020, and for us, it's always about moving forward and finding the best ways to reach more golfers.

I'm involved in many aspects of the day-to-day operations at Motocaddy, and I like to think I have a lot of passion for how the business operates. Our obsession with innovation and technology, exceptional build quality, genuine functionality and excellent service is what builds trust. Get those things right, and the marketing takes care of itself. **END**

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