

# BACKSPIN

Official E-Zine of Pitch and Putt Ireland

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Pitch and Putt  
Ireland

## Issue Highlights:

- Catalan Pairs
- Competition Formats
- 30 Years of Rankings
- JR in Catalonia

A Chara,

You are welcome to this our second edition of Backspin for 2021. It will serve as our final edition of the year as our Development Manager Shaun O'Donnell moves on to pastures new in the Middle East.

While we had a curtailed season in 2021 the main thing was that we completed what was set out to be played at the start of the summer as our season was not disrupted as it was in 2020 with the Public Health Restrictions.

We all hope a full calendar will return in 2022. Certainly what was played in 2021 was exciting and we hope you enjoyed our streams from Glenville (National U16 Matchplay), Ryston at the National Matchplay as well as from the National Strokeplay in Navan.

We had a successful trial of our first attempt at video calls as we spoke to our National Strokeplay Champions from Navan, Stackallen and Tullamore in a call hosted by our Vice President Mark Keohane. We hope to do another such call before Christmas and also another in the New Year prior to Convention.



The 2021 National Strokeplay. (L-R) Damien Fleming, Ian Donnelly, Mervyn Cooney, Stephen Murray and Kieran Earls.

# Catalan Pairs

by John Manning

20 Irish combinations made their way to the seventh Catalan Pairs at Sant Cebriain October, but only one managed to make the podium positions. A relatively novel pairing – the pride of Co Offaly, Aengus Coughlan and Jimmy Taylor – shot 20 under par 142 for the 54 holes to finish third.

“This was my first year to go to Spain and play in the competition,” explains Jimmy Taylor. “And it’s the first time we partnered. We played together before in the Ryder Cup (annual match between Erry and Tullamore).”

But the Clara men know each other’s games quite well, as Jimmy describes. “We play a bit together in various Scratch Cups. And we practice a good bit together in the club.”

To the former Provincial Matchplay champion goes the credit for conceiving the partnership. “As it was my first year, Aengus asked ‘will we play together?’ I said ‘No problem at all.’ It’s nice to play with a man who won a Leinster Matchplay and numerous Scratch Cups.” And Jimmy didn’t need to be asked twice. “It was a no brainer saying yeah.”

“Seven from Offaly on the trip,” recalls Jimmy, of the event, which was won by reigning Catalan Matchplay champion Joel Girbau and Lluís Cucurull who posted 24 under par for the three rounds.

A tradition dating back to 2004 and involving an Irish Strokeplay Champion and his Dublin friend (with Offaly connections) was upheld once again. “William Buckley Jr. goes every year and between him and Dennis Mona-

ghan they organize everything from hotels, flights, car hire and booking of courses. A lot of praise has to go to them with the work they put into it for everyone. They’re going nearly 20 years now and Dermot Wogan (Stackallen) is also in their group every year.”

A hectic schedule was the order of each day! “It was a great social event for us all but you don’t get a minute! It’s up for breakfast, then meet outside the hotel for 9.30am. William and Dermot then drive us to a course to play 18 holes, get lunch and then on to another course to play another round. It was ‘all go’ but very enjoyable.”

The group allowed themselves plenty of time to acclimatise and familiarise. “We arrived Monday morning and we played Sant Cebria after dinner on Monday. We then played it again the Wednesday and that was it until Saturday morning.”

The opening round at Sant Cebria was Greensomes and Jimmy confirms that the Offaly lads were dissatisfied with their 51, which left them trailing by eight strokes. “We were very disappointed - we couldn’t get the putters going. We were on every green but made nothing.”

A 49 in straight Foursomes (only two more than the best score of that round) gave the Faithful County duo renewed hope. “We started to roll in a few putts. It’s a tricky format, pitching every second hole, because on that course a lot of shots are over 70/80 metres and there is also a lot of tree trouble. You have to try and

work a shot to fade or draw the ball a bit. You're constantly thinking on each hole."

A podium finish was definitely on the minds of Jimmy and Aengus, albeit that top spot was out of reach. "Sunday was great. We spoke a bit about it Saturday night. We knew we were too far back at -8 when the leaders were -17 but we said we would try and get into the Top 5."

"All our crew were very upbeat and supportive Saturday night they were delighted one of our teams was in with a chance on Sunday," gushes Jimmy of the optimism of the midlands group, albeit a couple of other Irish pairs were ahead of Taylor and Coughlan at that stage – Cork's Frank Dineen and Robert O'Donoghue (-11) along with Ireland World Cup heroes John Walsh and Eamon Gibney (-10).

The Erry team took the positives from their Sunday draw. "We started on the third and anyone that played there knows the hardest holes are 3, 4 and 7," avers Jimmy, "so we knew if we got a good start we had the easier holes to finish. The 3rd is 82 metres and both me and Aengus pitched to three feet so we were off and running."

The result would be a superb final round of 42, which ultimately left the Coughlan/Taylor combination four back of the winners and one behind second-placed Alex Albinana/Roger Albinana. "Aengus made some great putts on the Sunday. We gave ourselves birdie chances on every hole and thankfully a few dropped. Playing with the two lads (Andorra International Pairs winners Josep Iglesias and Angel Navarro, whom they piped for third) was great and them playing well helped us and we were up for it to try and beat them."

Jimmy and Aengus left some very good Irish pairings trailing in their wake. "We had a great week's practice," Jimmy expounds. "We were playing against William and Dennis and we knew if you beat them you must be playing well. The matches were very competitive because if you lost you knew you were going to get some slugging at the dinner table that night!"

We wondered how much Jimmy's 2021 Erry Scratch Cup win helped. "I suppose it helped me a bit on the final day but, in fairness, I play a lot with some great players from our club and you learn a lot from them when they're in the mix of Scratch Cups. My partner has plenty of experience in winning so I think I kind of bounced off him too. On the first tee box you have that bit of nervous energy, (if you haven't then there is something wrong) but as you get into the round you're fine."

A return trip is on the cards. Jimmy would like to play again next year, "as it's very enjoyable and can only improve your overall game. I will have to be extra nice to my wife Michelle if I'm planning on going!"



Aengus Coughlan and Jimmy Taylor pictured in Catalonia.

# Competition Formats

By John Manning

*The playing of our game has changed down through the decades not least in terms of formats. In the following piece John Manning examines how singles, doubles and even three-player teams events have evolved throughout Pitch & Putt Ireland's history.*

Club Opens have part of the sport's tradition since the pre-Pitch & Putt Ireland days of the 1940's and 1950's.

Multi-card systems abounded. Five cards were permitted at some clubs, at others six, maybe even eight and elsewhere cards were unlimited. A figure of 2000 cards taken out during an Open was not unheard of during the halcyon days for Opens – the 1970s and 1980s.

18 Nett/Gross, 36 Nett/Gross, 54 Nett/Gross prizes were awarded, depending on location, with the majority of clubs favouring the Best two cards approach. Strokeplay was the format of choice.

The more affluent clubs presented Overall Best Nett and Gross prizes in addition to the graded equivalents. Queues at the first tee proliferated at the more fashionable Opens with two or three hour waits not uncommon.

Fourball v. Bogey (or its more modern iteration, Fourball v. Par) was a very popular format at Opens to accompany the Singles Strokeplay. The Fourball was typically contested on a separate day or sometimes during the afternoon following the end of singles play.

Business House and Inter-Firm team events mainly utilizing the Strokeplay genre (with associated Individual Nett and Gross awards) mushroomed in the 1960s and remained in vogue until the 1990s.

Foursomes were played in the Craven/Major Extra/Carrolls National Club Tournament from its inception in the 1960's and the All Ireland Mixed Foursomes tournament was introduced in 1971 along with provincial tournaments in 1983 (Leinster) and in 1984

(Munster). However the straight alternate shot format never really found traction at Club Opens, albeit the 1947 Collins Open featured an 18 hole Foursomes Strokeplay.

Scotch Foursomes though became (and still are) hugely popular. Terms such as "All-In", Gents, Ladies and Mixed entered the vernacular and 36-holes was again the preferred arrangement to decide prizes.

In the early 1990s most people in the Pitch & Putt world (particularly those in Limerick!) agreed that the Limerick Masters (sometimes the Limerick/Clare Masters) was unique in that it had been and continued to be the only 72-hole competition in the country. Played over three courses on a weekend in May, it attracted players from all over the country.

Inaugurated in 1975 by the Limerick County Board it was originally designed as a 108-hole tournament with two qualifying rounds of 36 holes each played at Ardnacrusha and Parteen on the Saturday and a final round of 36 holes played at Catholic Institute (a super course, now sadly no more) on Sunday. Accommodation for visiting players was arranged at Hanratty's Hotel Limerick with a sherry reception attended by the Mayor of Limerick at 11am on Saturday!

It was found that the 36-hole qualifying rounds created a problem in the timings because of the travel between the courses so the County Board decided on qualifying rounds of 18 holes and that the final round of 36 holes would rotate between the three clubs. This format applied since 1976.

National Presidents such as Eamon Birchall, John Smith, Liam Houlihan and Tommy Murphy were honoured guests during the early stagings of the Limerick Masters and were joined by other Central Council Officers Joe Leahy, Kevin Lambert and Peg Smith along with Munster Council President Jack Fitzgerald.

Hall of Famer Andy Dempsey was the first winner of the Limerick Masters and the event Roll of Honour is liberally sprinkled with many of Pitch and Putt's top stars.

What was originally listed as the St. Anne's/Rocklodge Open for August 7th/8th 1976 became the Cork Classic. Both clubs were celebrating anniversaries (Rocklodge their 30th and St. Anne's their tenth) and decided to pool resources and hold the first ever Cork Classic – a 72 hole event with 36 being played at each course. The Cork Classic ran until 1979.

In the mid-1970s, Insurance broker Harry Eakins, a lifelong member of Catholic Institute, presented a blueprint for a competition that was to change the Pitch & Putt scene all over Ireland. The Neville Scratch Cup was held on August 10th 1975 and is commonly considered to be the first-ever Pitch & Putt Scratch Cup. Eugene O'Leary (Collins) emerged as the inaugural winner.

In 2019 (the last full season before Covid hit), upwards of 50 Scratch Cups were contested across the country.

The forward thinking Douglas club introduced their Nett Cup (over 18 holes Strokeplay) in 2008. Eight handicapper Ian Leech (St Stephens) produced a superb 38 Nett to capture the Cup and a €300 voucher by a couple of shots from local nine-handicapper Ciarán Elley.

The Scramble format gained popularity on Texas golf courses in the 1950's. Pitch & Putt began to adopt the Scramble concept in the last few years of the 20th century and the Short Grass Classic and the GRIP Classic were first listed in the 1999 Fixture Book. The relaxed, informal manner of Scrambles has been hugely appealing.

The Kildare County Board Short Grass Classic Scramble has become the foremost such tournament with

pilgrimages to Ryston, Athgarvan, McDonagh and St. Bridget's an annual staple trip for teams from all over Ireland every October. Over 500 players tee up in this four-rounder annually.

Dublin's GRIP Scramble (also 72 holes Strokeplay) was originally held over the Glenville, RGSC, IGB and Dublin Postal courses). With the latter two layouts sadly lost to the sport, Lucan and Shandon now co-host with Glenville and RGSC. These days, the event honours the memory of the late Kevin Blackburn (RIP) whose administrative skills were synonymous with the fledgling years of the GRIP.

Huge fields also participated in the Meath Scramble, which was also regularly played in October over 72 holes – a round each at Stackallen, Navan, Gaeil Colmcille and Castletown. Around 2002, Meath County Board attracted excellent sponsorship for the event, courtesy of Mediterranean Tiles, Ashbourne and Drogheda.

So popular did Scrambles prove that a National Scramble was inaugurated by the NEC in 2008. That lasted until 2013, visiting iconic courses in Kerry (Tralee and Castleisland), Meath (Navan and Castletown), Offaly (Erry and Tullamore), Cork (Douglas and Ballinlough) as well as Dublin (RGSC and Lucan). It was won on three occasions by Riverdale.

# 30 Years of Rankings

By John Manning

The late Michael Hayes (RIP) produced many innovations during his productive term as the first-ever full-time Development and Coaching Administrator of Pitch & Putt Ireland.

One of Michael's most enduring inventions was the Pitch and Putt Ireland National Ranking system, which reached a thirty-year milestone in 2021.

The accolade of No. 1 ranked player at season end has been much coveted by the top Ladies and Gents players over the past three decades.

Having just clinched the second of his three National Matchplay crowns at Cement, Sean Harkins (Shandon) topped the Gents Ranking at the end of the 1991 campaign– the inaugural year of the listings.

That season's National Ladies Matchplay champion Norma O'Brien (Douglas) was the first-ever No. 1 ranked Lady player at the conclusion of the 1991 Championships. Nowadays, the No 1 ranked players receive a presentation at Annual

Convention in recognition of their playing exploits.

Players are rewarded for performance in the National Strokeplay and Matchplay Championships in addition to the provincial and county equivalents. Points earned in the current year are counted at full value; those earned two years (50%) and one year (25%) previously undergo appropriate percentage reductions.

Ten different gents have ascended to the top of the Rankings over the past thirty years.

Sean Downes (Stackallen) took over from Sean Harkins as Ireland's No. 1 at the end of 1992 and held that lofty status until the end of 1996 as the Meath man enjoyed his period of dominance in the Pitch and Putt majors.

Norma O'Brien retained Ladies No. 1 spot for three years before being succeeded by the legendary Geraldine Ward (Portmarnock). Three-time national individual champion Norma remains the only Cork lady to attain the No. 1 mark.



**Michael Hayes (RIP)**

The prestigious position at the summit of the ladies sport has been shared by nine top exponents over the 30 years.

Geraldine Ward has been Ireland's No. 1 rated lady player on no fewer than ten occasions, including five years in a row from 2014.

Closely behind Ger on eight awards is her friendly rival and present occupant Chrissie Byrne (Ryston), who scooped the laurels four years on the spin from 2010.

Over the last 18 years, only Tracey McGrath (2009) and Martha O'Brien last year have broken the Geraldine Ward/Chrissie Byrne stranglehold.

Other multiple ladies no. 1 assessed players were: Marian Byrne (top twice), Bernadette Coffey (also twice) and the late Peggy Campbell (RIP), who won in 2002 and 2003.

The Pitch & Putt Ireland Rankings were generously sponsored by Waterford Crystal in the 1990s around the time that John Walsh (Collins) took over from Sean Downes as the country's top gent.

John Walsh was at the apex of affairs in 1997 and 1998, a place he has occupied on seven occasions overall, including four in a row from 2014.

Ray Murphy succeeded his perennial rival John Walsh as Ireland's leading player in 1999. Ray has held the mantle of Ireland's foremost exponent eight times, a distinction he also achieved four seasons in succession from 2006 – a period that saw him bag six National individual titles including the "double-double" in 2006 and 2007.

The names of Walsh (at No 5) and Murphy (ninth) first appeared in the Top 10 in 1994 and have rarely been far from the summit ever since.

Another Corkman, Darren Collins (St. Annes) has held the No 1 slot on two occasions. Current

kingpin Damien Fleming (Deerpark) has just completed a third successive season as the country's leading performer.

The first No. 1 ranked player, Sean Harkins is still listed in the Top 50 thirty years on. 2021 Cork Strokeplay Champion John O'Leary was ranked No. 8 in 1991 (after his provincial strokeplay win at Bruff) and is still in the Top 30 three decades later.

An extraordinary indication of Breda White's enduring status as a top-quality performer is that the Tipperary Hills star occupied second position on the inaugural year-end ranking list in 1991 and holds exactly the same spot on the latest list.

Breda's successive runners-up performances in the National Ladies Matchplay Championship are principal contributors to her current ranking status while back in the early 1990's, Breda was the dominant player in Munster Strokeplay and Matchplay Championships.

Geraldine Ward first appeared in the Ladies season-end Top 10 in 1992 and has been practically ever-present in the intervening period.

Ireland's present-day No. 9 ranked lady Margaret Hogan (Tullamore) was third when the inaugural Order of Merit was published back in 1991.

The name Chrissie Byrne first appeared in the Ladies Rankings at No. 48 at the end of Millennium Year 2000. After being 66th in 2003, Damien Fleming first entered the Top 50 Gents at the conclusion of the 2004 campaign.



Geraldine Ward from Portmarnock P & P.

YEAR	No. 1 Ranked Lady	Club	No. 1 Ranked Gent	Club
1991	Norma O'Brien	Douglas	Sean Harkins	Shandon
1992	Norma O'Brien	Douglas	Sean Downes	Stackallen
1993	Norma O'Brien	Douglas	Sean Downes	Stackallen
1994	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Sean Downes	Stackallen
1995	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Sean Downes	Stackallen
1996	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Sean Downes	Stackallen
1997	Marina O'Rourke	Cloghogue	John Walsh	Collins
1998	Marian Byrne	St. Bridget's	John Walsh	Collins
1999	Marian Byrne	St. Bridget's	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2000	Bernadette Coffey	St. Bridget's	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2001	Bernadette Coffey	St. Bridget's	Mark Millar	Cement
2002	Peggy Campbell (RIP)	Glenville	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2003	Peggy Campbell (RIP)	Glenville	William Buckley Jun.	Erry
2004	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Darren Collins	St. Anne's
2005	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	Darren Collins	St. Anne's
2006	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2007	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2008	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2009	Tracey McGrath	Erry	Ray Murphy	Templebreedy
2010	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	John Walsh	Collins
2011	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	John Walsh	Collins
2012	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	Jonathan Goodall	Tralee
2013	Chrissie Byrne	St. Bridget's	Ray Murphy	St. Anne's
2014	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	John Walsh	Collins
2015	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	John Walsh	Collins
2016	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	John Walsh	Collins
2017	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	John Walsh	Collins
2018	Geraldine Ward	Portmarnock	Bryan Delaney	Bishopstown
2019	Chrissie Byrne	Ryston	Damien Fleming	Deerpark
2020	Martha O'Brien	Lakeside	Damien Fleming	Deerpark
2021	Chrissie Byrne	Ryston	Damien Fleming	Deerpark



# JR prospers in Catalonia after ‘Gram Slam’ at home

By John Manning

Late October/early November is hardly the height of the Pitch and Putt season but John Ross Crangle will remember that period of the 2021 campaign with much fondness.

John Ross was one of four Irishmen to make the journey to Lleida, Catalonia to contest the first World Pitch & Putt Tour event on November 12/14 and ended the weekend as top Irishman and also leading non Catalan player.

This was a presentation tournament for the World Pitch & Putt Tour (WPPT), which aims to bring the best 144 Pitch and Putt players on the planet together to participate in five tournaments annually at locations across the globe.

JR chose to play his opening 36 holes on Friday. Presumably for Covid-19 reasons, the organisers at Lleida gave competitors their choice, with approximately half the field playing on Friday and the remainder on Saturday.

The Loughlinstown man opened with a 48 and then added a 47, both rounds impressively bogey

-free. At Friday’s close of play, JR trailed Catalan Alejandro Esmatges by a stroke.

Saturday’s proceedings were dominated by a couple of Catalans. Joel Moscatel, son of FIPPA President Victor, fashioned 18’s of 47 and 45 to post 16 under par for 36 holes. Although an amateur, Moscatel has been gaining golf experience on the Alps Tour (third tier of the European/World Tour) and he led by one at Lleida overnight from Alex Albinyana.

The teenage prodigy Albinyana, who represented Catalonia against Ireland at Seapoint in 2018 and in the European Championship the same year, carded a first round 44 at Lleida and added a 49 to be poised to challenge on Sunday.

As Moscatel dropped back with a 51 final round, Albinyana’s 48 gave the youngster a single stroke victory over fellow Catalans Eloi Hernandez, Emilio Cuartero and Friday’s leader Alejandro Esmatges.



JR Crangle (left) won the Dublin Matchplay Championships prior to competing in Catalonia.

JR's putter wasn't hugely co-operative on Sunday but he still mustered a 51, despite dropping his only shot of the round on the fifth. Crangle's final total of 16 under par 146 saw the Dublin star finish tied with a group of four Catalans and Gonzalo Mendoza of Andorra.

2014 Irish Open champion Eamon Gibney (Castletown) managed a Top 20 finish at Lleida. The World Cup and European Team Championship winner from Co Meath signed for 48+51+50=149.

Frank Dineen (St Annes) and John Walsh (Collins) both finished on 104 for the opening 36 holes but didn't survive the cut that reduced the field of 132 to 36 for the final round.

Of course, three weeks before travelling to Spain, John Ross Crangle beat Joe Joyce (Glenville) in the Dublin Matchplay championship at Glenville, thereby becoming the third player in history from the capital to achieve the 'Grand Slam' of County Matchplay and Stroke-

play, Provincial Matchplay and Strokeplay along with the National Matchplay and Strokeplay.

It all started for JR when he posted an impressive 134 at Erin's Isle to secure a 10-stroke victory in the 2009 Dublin Strokeplay Championship.

That was the same year that JR claimed the first of his four Leinster Matchplay titles – at Seapoint. Provincial Strokeplay success first came JR's way in 2012 at Navan with 141, which was a brace better than Seapoint's Brian McGinn.

JR's 2017 National Matchplay success at Tipperary Hills in 2017 was followed two years later by his overdue National Strokeplay win at Ryston.

JR's feat matches the exploits of two other Dublin Pitch & Putt legends – Gus Carolan and the late David Hayden RIP.

As a member of RGSC, Carolan was crowned Leinster Matchplay kingpin at Guinness in 1981 with 3&2 final victory over Peter Bell (Irish Ropes). 1981 was the year of Carolan double for he defeated the late Jack McCormack



The Catalonia Pairs 2021.

(Kilbeggan) in a play-off for the Leinster Strokeplay Championship in Athgarvan after a tie on 96.

Carolán was playing out of Lucan when he won his Dublin Matchplay Cup at Campions in 1973, beating local man Pat Barnes by 3&2 in the decider. That followed his Dublin Strokeplay triumph on home turf at Lucan in 1971 when his 105 on a tough day scoring-wise delivered a one stroke win.

Of course, ‘Gussie’s’ Grand Slam run began with a 1up win over Eamon O’Reilly (Ballincollig) in the 1968 National Matchplay final at Portmarnock. The first of his two successive National Strokeplay wins arrived in 1974, courtesy of a 97 return around Mellows, which gave Carolán a stroke to spare over Jim Redmond of Athgarvan.

The sadly-missed David Hayden outlasted his Old County colleague David Grainger in a play-off for the 1987 National Strokeplay championship at Portmarnock. The Crumlin club representatives had finished level on 90 after the regulation 36 holes.

The following year, David secured the first of his two Day Cup victories in a row when he beat James Angland (Crosshaven) by 5&4 in the National Matchplay final at Lucan.

David won three Leinster Strokeplay Championships in all. His initial win was earned while still wearing the Old County colours, scoring 94 at St. Lomans (Mullingar) to win by five shots from club colleague Tommy Golding.

Hayden had switched club allegiance to Lucan by the time he first captured the Dublin Strokeplay championship. That was in Millennium Year 2000 when a three-round tally of 142 at Lu-

can saw him home by three from club-mate Anthony Malone.

A 2004 Leinster Matchplay final win over his great friend Derek Courtney (Glenville) by 1up at Old County left Hayden on the cusp of the ‘Grand Slam’.

Although he captured the Dublin Strokeplay Cup on three occasions, Hayden had to wait until 2014 to finally lift the Matchplay trophy. David beat Keith Redmond (Lucan) by 7&6 in the final at RGSC to complete his ‘Grand Slam’.

1987 and 2014 (gap of 27 years) bookended David Hayden’s achievements. It took Gus Carolán thirteen years to win all six events. John Ross Crangle joins this illustrious club, having taken just a dozen years to nail down the six legs of the ‘Slam’.



David Hayden (RIP)

# A message from Mervyn

## Message from our President

The curtain has come down on another restricted Pitch & Putt season; again we were limited to our two major championships and both our U16 Boys & Girls Championships.

While we once again were deprived of our Provincial events we did have Strokeplay and Matchplay Championships at County and Regional level and some Boards were able to play leagues or other events. The entries in our National events were in general up on 2020 which was most encouraging.

I won't review the Championships as this has already been done, but suffice to say they were memorable events that will live long in the memory.

Clubs who applied for and staged Scratch Cups or Opens enjoyed considerable support with full

timesheets in most cases, bringing in much needed revenue to many of our clubs. I have no doubt many within our clubs will debate whether to continue with the 36-hole timesheet format or revert to a 54-hole event. At the end of the day this will be a decision for our clubs and we may end up with a mixture of both.

This year has seen a further increase in registrations which is most welcome for our sport. The decision of the NEC to accept my proposal to reduce the registration fee by €5 has resulted in over €40,000 remaining within our clubs; this together with well supported Scratch Cups will have helped strengthen the finances of many of our clubs.

The handicap system remains a topic of conversation for many; I would like to clarify a couple of issues which still appear to cause some confusion.

1. The system does not allocate handicaps; this



President Mervyn Cooney.

was changed four years ago. The club is the ultimate authority when it comes to awarding a first handicap.

2. A club can continue to adjust a players handicap based on general play, and can also increase the cut imposed by the system if they deem it appropriate.

3. The NEC have given numerous opportunities to club committees to adjust their members playing handicaps to reflect a players overall ability, some have done this in a fair and balanced way, others have not.

4. Clubs are asked to return a minimum of 5 competitions between March 1st and October 31st, not a huge ask over eight months. In some cases clubs return way in excess of this and many others return more than minimum or slightly over. Unfortunately we have clubs who return much less or in the case of a number of clubs enter no internal events. They do enter scores from a Scratch Cup or Open that they host. County/ Regional Boards are also offenders where results of Championships are not entered this means the mandatory cuts are not applied and results in players playing off incorrect handicaps. To date the NEC have been very lenient in relation to these shortcomings but this is about to change.

5. The issue of non returns was a hot topic throughout the playing season, and this unsporting habit does have a bearing on the cuts imposed on those who always return their score. The NEC have received a printout of all non returns for the 2021 season and it makes for interesting reading, with some players having in ex-

cess of 30 NR's recorded.

At a recent meeting the NEC discussed a number of options open to them in relation to this practice, a response was agreed and this will be published before the end of the year. It is unfortunate that this has to be the course of action but I think it is generally accepted that some action is required in this area.

We have made a return to our office at Sport HQ, which will make things easier for everyone. I want to once again thank Michael for making his home available as our office for the past 18 months; I think we all agree this was a huge imposition on his family.

Shaun O'Donnell is leaving us after a two year spell as our Development Administrator, I want to thank him for his contribution to our sport, much of the work that Shaun and myself wanted to carry out was made almost impossible due to Covid-19 restrictions, nonetheless much was achieved especially in relation to the Governance Code.

I would like to wish Shaun the very best in his new role in Qatar.

In conclusion may I wish all our members and their families a happy and peaceful Christmas, and we look forward to a full calendar of events in 2022.

Mervyn

# Coaching & Development

## - A Farewell note

**By Shaun O'Donnell**

I started the role of Coaching and Development Manager back in August 2019. My experience in Pitch and Putt up to that point was playing on a course in Buncrana back home in Donegal many years ago, the course has long closed down.

Over the last two and a bit years, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working with Pitch and Putt Ireland, Unfortunately the majority of this time was disrupted by the pandemic. The experiences that I have had will benefit me in the workplace going forward in the long term. One of the very few benefits of the pandemic was that the participation of our game grew, with some people taking up the sport for the first time and some that may have stepped away in recent times return.

I met some passionate people in my time with Pitch and Putt Ireland and hope that participation levels continue to grow over the coming years. I was delighted to be part of the team that completed the Governance Code. This was a project that many people contributed towards over a number of years, making Pitch and Putt Ireland on par with some of the largest sports in the country in terms of governance.

Children's safeguarding has developed in recent times and I was part of a number of child safeguarding projects during my time with Pitch and Putt Ireland. Hopefully this can continue to develop with Sport Ireland planning to carry out club audits regularly.

I have recently accepted a new role in Qatar working with a football club. I am moving over with my partner Orla, I'm sure it'll be a bit different from back home but hopefully we can get settled in quickly.

I would like to thank Anne Tighe and Michael Murphy for all their help and support in the office (also the constant supply of treats!). I would also like to thank Mervyn Cooney and Breda Brophy for the opportunities and guidance during my time with the company. I have collaborated with Jason O'Connor while putting the Backspin magazines together and he was always a pleasure to work with. I would finally like to thank all the members of the NEC who were very helpful during my time with Pitch and Putt Ireland.

I would like to wish all Pitch and Putt Ireland members the very best for the future and I will be keeping an eye on developments to the game over the coming years. Also a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to everyone and hopefully we can have a much less disrupted 2022.

Yours in sport,

Shaun O'Donnell

Pitch & Putt Ireland

Coaching & Development Manager

# BACKSPIN PRODUCTION TEAM

Jason O'Connor, John Manning and Shaun O'Donnell

This edition sees John Manning take a look at the 30-year history of the PPI Rankings, the history of competition formats along with a look at some continental Pitch & Putt in the form of last weekend's first World Series event and the recent Catalan Pairs and specifically the performance of Erry pair Jimmy Taylor and Aonghus Coughlan. John also explains the meaning of John Ross Crangle's performance over the wider contest of the last month.

Our President Mervyn Cooney has a message for us as usual as he addresses some issues that arose during the year and our Development Manager Shaun O'Donnell also speaks on his time in the role. I think we can all agree Shaun was slightly unlucky in that he was really only settling into the role when Covid-19 hit and it denied him the opportunity to do the job to its fullest potential.

I want to personally thank him for his work on Backspin since we did our first edition together back in December 2019 and I would like to wish

both his partner Orla and himself well in their new life in Qatar and at least there will be one Irishman in the country for next year's World Cup all going well!

I will put Backspin on hold again pending a discussion with Shaun's replacement on how to move the project forward into the future.

I want to thank everyone who has offered assistance to me this year in the role and hope we all see you again in person in 2022.

Might be slightly early to say it but-  
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,

Jason O'Connor

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