



Pitch and Putt
Ireland

Backspin

Official E-Zine of Pitch and Putt Ireland

December 2023



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the final edition of the Pitch and Putt Ireland Backspin for 2023. With club turkey competitions more or less completed and plans afoot around the country for Winter and Spring leagues, we take a look back at the end of season championships and events in this edition which had a strong team and international theme to them.

On the home front Declan Sheedy reviews the National Inter-Club which concluded in St. Bridget's at the end of October and the Interprovincial Challenge between Leinster & Munster in aid of the Childrens Hospital in Temple Street. Declan also reviews the Ireland v Catalonia challenge which took place in Montseny in Catalonia in October along with the International Pairs in Saint Cebria and the WPPT Ireland event in Ringcommons where there was success of our Irish players.

John Manning meets and interviews Tadgh Harrington of Lucan and talks to him about his return to the game in 2020, his progression since then and a number of other things Pitch & Putt. Finally John provides us also with a look ahead to the major events on the 2024 International Pitch & Putt calendar.

I hope you have enjoyed the series of Backspin released throughout 2023 and hope the game can be further promoted, advertised and marketed in 2024 via similar outlets.

I wish everyone a very happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas and 2024.

Yours in sport

Declan Sheedy

Editor

National Championship & Challenge Reviews

By Declan Sheedy

National Interclub Championships @ St. Bridgets

The National Inter-Club Championship made a welcome return to the Pitch & Putt calendar this year returning with a new and revised format. Teams of six players made up of two Senior, two Intermediate and two Junior players would be the new team structure with clubs being able to enter multiple number of teams where possible. 33 teams from across 18 clubs entered the qualifying rounds which took place in late September in Riverdale and Tipperary Hills with the Top 5 teams from each venue moving onto the finals in St. Bridgets at the end of October. Teams played 18 holes Scotch Foursomes and 18 Singles with all score to count thus getting the right pairings together for the Scotch Foursomes was pivotal. At the end of a very competitive qualifying weekend the following teams would secure their place in the finals the following month

Riverdale Qualifier:Deerpark 1, St. Annes 1, Fermoy, Lakeside 1 and Larkspur Park 1

Tipp Hills Qualifier:Bruff 2, Riverdale 1, Tralee 1, St. Patricks 1 and Tullamore 1

At the finals on October 29th, the 10 qualified teams again lined up playing the same format of 18 scotch foursomes and 18 singles where at the end of play the two teams with the best score would go head to head in Matchplay format for the gold and silver medal whilst the teams finishing third and fourth would face each other in matchplay for the bronze. Pairings would prove key for all teams in what was a very competitive morning of play with all teams eagerly seeking a top two spots. It would turn out to be a very close affair at the end of play with only four shots separating the Top 5 teams. Bruff 2 team would take the number 1 spot with a team total of 25 under which included an excellent 10 under in the scotch from Tommy Hanley and Shaun Donegan. Four times champions Fermoy took the coveted second place, a shot behind Bruff 2 on 24 under and a shot ahead of St. Annes who finished third on 23 under. Fermoy's team score was greatly aided by an exceptional 10 under singles score by John Cahill in setting up a final between themselves and Bruff. St. Annes 1 would have to settle with a 3rd & 4th place match in which they would face St. Patricks 1 who secured the 4th spot on a count back from Tralee 1.

In the final, played as head to head Matchplay, Fermoy would take a 2-1 lead after the scotch foursomes with the pairing of John Cahill & William Fitzgerald defeating Aidan O'Sullivan & Stephen Hanley by 3&2 while Daithi Sexton and son Ryan were 4&3 victors over John Farrell & Kieran Donegan. Tommy Hanley & Shaun Donegan won a very close battle against Pdraig Hannon & Daniel O'Reagn on the 20th hole for Bruff's point. In the Singles Fermoy would take victory in the two senior matches as John Cahill beat John Farrell 7&6 while Daithi Sexton beat Tommy Hanley 2&1. This left Fermoy needing only one more point from the remaining four matches and they duly proceeded to secure the points needed with both teams sharing two wins each in the final four matches with Ryan Sexton and Pdraig Hannon securing the points for Fermoy to give them the title, their fifth in a row going back to 2016-19, while Stephen Hanley and Aidan O'Sullivan would win for Bruff. A very competitive and sporting final would see Fermoy run out 6-3 victors and lift the title once again.

The third place match would be a very close affair between St. Annes and St. Patricks where in the end it would be the Cork club who would edge it and run out 5-4 winners. St. Patricks would lead 2-1 heading into the singles thanks for wins for the pairings Ruairi Fortune & Paul Gorby and John Hudson & Lee Murphy. In the singles there were a number of matches which would only be seperated by a single hole but all went in favour of the St. Annes club in addition to the match between Frank Dineen and Dylan Hudson requiring extra holes with Frank taking the crucial win for St. Annes. These very close games which swung in St. Annes favour would prove the difference with St. Annes winning the singles session 4-2 and securing a 5-4 victory overall and the bronze medal. Congratulations to Fermoy on a fifth successive victory in this championship and hopefully this new format and championship can continue to go from strength to strength in the comings years.





Full results from the final matchplays below.

Final:

Bruff		Fermoy	
Scotch Foursomes			
Tommy Hanley & Shaun Donegan	20 th		Padraig Hannon & Daniel O'Regan
Aidan O'Sullivan & Stephen Hanley		3&2	John Cahill & William Fitzgerald
John Farrell & Kieran Donegan		4&3	Daithi Sexton & Ryan Sexton
Singles			
Tommy Hanley		2&1	Daithi Sexton
John Farrell		7&6	John Cahill
Aidan O'Sullivan	2&1		Daniel O'Regan
Shaun Donegan		1up	Ryan Sexton
Stephen Hanley	2&1		William Fitzgerald
Kieran Donegan		6&5	Padraig Hannon

3rd & 4th Place Playoff:

St. Annes		St. Patricks	
Scotch Foursomes			
Ray Murphy & Damien Peelo		2&1	Ruairi Fortune & Paul Gorby
Frank Dineen & Pat Sheehan	4&3		Dylan Hudson & Eddie Doyle
Ian Leech & David Murphy		1up	John Hudson & Lee Murphy
Singles			
Ray Murphy	1up		John Hudson
Frank Dineen	19 th		Dylan Hudson
Ian Leech		6&4	Paul Gorby
David Murray	1up		Ruairi Fortune
Pat Sheehan	3&2		Lee Murphy
Damien Peelo		2&1	Eddie Doyle

Leinster v Munster Interprovincial Challenge @ McDonagh

A new Interprovincial challenge between Leinster and Munster was announced by the NEC in September and played on November 4th in McDonagh between the Top 12 ranked gents players from both Leinster and Munster. The challenge was be ran in aid of Temple Street Childrens Hospital with all proceed collected from the event going to this very worthy cause.

The format itself has been one which had been discussed for many years with many eager to see which province would come out as inter-provincial champions in a head to head battle. This inagrual event didn't disappoint with the top ranked gents players taking to the tee in their provincial colour to battle it out. The format would be 18 hole Matchplay with the first session being six match of scotch foursomes followed by twelve 18 hole singles. A typical November's day in Ireland greeted the players with some light showers on an otherwise cool day in the Curragh. Given each team contained the top ranked players in each of their provinces every match would prove to be an intriguing battle regardless of how the draw would unfold. Over the short 18 format and the very high standard of play everyone wanted a fast start and avoid giving any early advantage away to their opponent. The first match of the challenge would see the Munster pairing Ray Murphy & Damien Fleming take on Louth duo Sean Googin & Jim Judge.

It would be the Munster duo who put the first points on the board with a 4&3 and this would be followed soon after with a second point coming from Stephen Shoer & John Cahill's 3&1 victory over Stephen Murray & Gary Healy. Leinster's first points of the day came courtesy of Sean Harkins & George McGreal who had a convincing 5&4 win over Paudie O'Sullivan and James Cleary. The Limerick/Cork combination for Kieran Earls & Barry Morrissey added another point for Munster with a 2&1 win over Darren Fagan and Dean Grannell. Leinster would however fight back to claim the last two matches in the opening session with Ian Dillon & Eamon Gibney defeating Cork duo John Walsh & Daithi Sexton by 3&2 while Mark Millar & Chris Gallagher were 2&1 victors over Stephen O'Reilly & Jason Cregan. A scoreline of 3-3 at the end of the opening Scotch Foursomes sessions set it up perfectly for a head to head battle in the singles played in the afternoon.

With each of the teams knowing a fast start was crucial, team managers Anthony Malone (Leinster) and John Looney (Munster) with their vice captians Darren Keogh & Patsy Fagan (Leinster) and John O'Leary & Tommy Hanley (Munster) carefully selected the order of their teams seeking to get points on the board first. Leinster would select the two Kildare players as first and second out in the form of Sean Harkins and Ian Dillon with the hope that home county advantage and support could play a part. Sean and Ian would not let their team or manager down as both would register wins in the first two matches and quickly give Leinster a cruical lead. Sean would defeat Damien Fleming 2&1 while Ian would defeat current National Strokeplay Champion Stephen Shoer by 4&3. Match 3 was halved between Sean Googins and Barry Morrissey but there was further joy in Match 4 for Leinster as Chris Gallagher defeated the inform John Cahill 2&1. Having only taken a half point from the first 4 Munster knew they needed to quickly notch up some wins. James Cleary and Paudie O'Sullivan would return victors against Darren Fagan and George McGreal respectively.

In the pivotal middle matches Munster would have to settle with half points as there was nothing to separate John Walsh & Stephen Murray and Jason Cregan and Dean Grannell, Dean coming from three down with three to play to earn a half. That meant Munster needed to win at least 2 of the remaining four matches to have a chance of winning. Leinster however had other plans. Jim Judge secured a key win over Ray Murphy in Match 8 by 1 up. Kieran Earls would win Match 10 by 2&1 against Mark Millar for Munster but Leinster would claim the last two matches as Gary Healy and Eamon Gibney both won their games by 2&1 against Daithi Sexton and Stephen O'Reilly respectively. In the end Leinster would win the singles session on a score of 7.5 to Munsters 3.5 and a final winning tally of 10.5 to 7.5

An excellent challenge and display of pitch and putt was on show on the day and congratulation to the winning Leinster team pictured below. Plans going forward is that we will see this charity based challenge become an annual fixture in the PPI calendar with next year's Interprovincial challenge possibly going down a different route and involving other players in the game.

The most important part of this challenge was of course the charity and great cause this was played for. A big thank you goes to everyone who donated and sponsored this event where a total of €8,851.82 was collected and donated to Temple Street Children Hospitals this month. Picture below sees PPI President Mark Keohane and Leinster & Munster captains Anthony Malone and John Looney had over a cheque to the Childrens Foundation.



See below the results from each of the matches

Munster		Leinster	
Scotch Foursomes			
Ray Murphy & Damien Fleming	4&3		Sean Googin & Jim Judge
Stephen Shoer & John Cahill	3&1		Stephen Murray & Gary Healy
Paudie O'Sullivan & James Cleary		5&4	Sean Harkins & George McGreal
Kieran Earls & Barry Morrissey	2&1		Darren Fagan & Dean Grannell
John Cahill & Daithi Sexton		3&2	Ian Dillon & Eamon Gibney
Stephen O'Reilly & Jason Cregan		2&1	Mark Millar & Chris Gallagher
Singles			
Damien Fleming		2&1	Sean Harkins
Stephen Shoer		4&3	Ian Dillon
Barry Morrissey		Tied	Sean Googin
John Cahill		2&1	Chris Gallagher
James Cleary	3&2		Darren Fagan
Jason Cregan		Tied	Dean Grannell
Paudie O'Sullivan	4&3		George McGreal
John Walsh		Tied	Stephen Murray
Ray Murphy		1up	Jim Judge
Kieran Earls	2&1		Mark Millar
Daithi Sexton		2&1	Gary Healy
Stephen O'Reilly		2&1	Eamon Gibney



International Challenge and Competitions Reviews

By Declan Sheedy

Ireland v Catalonia International Challenge @ Montseny, Catalonia



It was defeat for the Irish team on a score line of 16.5 to 7.5 points in the 2023 Ireland v Catalonia International Challenge played at the Montseny Pitch & Putt course in Catalonia on October 20th. This was the eighth staging of this particular challenge with Ireland having won five of the previous seven stagings, the last coming in 2018 when Ireland defeated Catalonia by 13-5 in Seapoint. Catalonia's win in October now brings the overall record to 5-3 in favour of Ireland.

Similar to the previous challenge in Seapoint the two teams would be represented by six ladies and six U16 players. The Irish team selected for 2023 was Chrissie Sheedy (Ryston), Ger Ward (Portmarnock), Mary Murray (Rocklodge), Breda White (Tipperary Hills), Paula Lynch (Oldcastle), Liz Quinn (Collinstown), Brian McCarthy (Deerpark), Nathan Cronin (Deerpark), Ajay Barrett (Listowel), Joe Franklin (Hillview), Jack McShane (Gowran) and Peadar O'Toole (Athgarvan). The Matchplay format for the Montseny event was agreed to be 18 hole fourball, 18 hole scotch foursome and 18 hole singles all play over one day. The Ladies would complete against each other as would the U16 players with the total points from each section being added together to determined the overall team winner.

Unfortunately on the eve of the match Liz Quinn suffered an injury and had to unfortunately withdraw with Glenda Hoey (Lucan) stepping up to take her place at the last minute. Weather conditions for the challenge were very pleasant and the course was in excellent condition with a fair but challenging test ahead for the player. In the opening fourball session it was the Catalonian team which took a very strong hold of the match taking five points from the

available six in the opening session. Ireland's point came courtesy of half points earned in their halved matches from Chrissie Sheedy/Mary Murray and Breda White/Glenda Hoey.

Knowing they need a strong second session in the scotch foursome the Irish team fought very hard but it would be the Catalonia who extended their lead taking the second session on a score of 3.5-2.5, extending their overall lead to 8.5-3.5 going into the singles. Wins for Chrissie Sheedy/Mary Murray and Breda White/Glenda Hoey and a half point from Brian McCarthy/Ajay Barrett kept Ireland in it but they knew they would need something very special in the singles to defeat the home players. Unfortunately it would prove too much for a deficit to overturn and despite a brilliant effort from all the Irish players the Catalan team would claim the final single session also by 8-4 and a final score of 16.5-7.5.

Ireland's points in the singles would come from Chrissie Sheedy winning her game 2&1 who was unbeaten in all her matches, Ger Ward picked up a half point halving the match with her opponent, Ajay Barrett claimed half a point, Joe Franklin secured a 1up win in his game while Jack McShane claimed a point for Ireland with a 3&2 win in the final match. In the end it would be a 7.5-4.5 win for the Catalan Ladies and a 9 - 3 win for the Catalan U16 team, final total Catalan 16.5 Ireland 7.5

Despite the comprehensive and deserving victory by the Catalan team, it was a valiant effort by the Irish team on a course new to all players with many hole distances much longer than Irish courses. All players wore the green, white and gold with pride and gave 100% effort throughout. While the final scoreline will show a large winning margin, in many of the individual matches the games came down to the final hole or two and with a small bit more luck a number of the games could have gone the way of the Irish which could have changed the complexion of the final results.

While the cup remained in Catalonia the Irish team would return home having acquitted themselves very well, doing themselves, their club and country proud.





Full results below

Catalonia		Ireland	
Fourball			
Martha Cucrull & Gloria Ruiz	4&3		Ger Ward & Paula Lynch
Martha Fuster & Soraya Lassal		Tied	Breda White & Glenda Hoey
Conchi Carballo & Ma Angels Taulats		Tied	Chrissie Sheedy & Mary Murray
Jan Bernet & Ciara Martinez	3&1		Brian McCarthy & Ajay Barrett
Yago Izquierdo & Biel Cababes	2&1		Nathan Cronin & Joe Franklin
Marti Luja & Nil Artigas	1up		Jack McShane & Peadar O'Toole
Scotch Foursomes			
Martha Cucrull & Gloria Ruiz	1up		Ger Ward & Paula Lynch
Conchi Carballo & Ma Angels Taulats		4&3	Breda White & Glenda Hoey
Martha Fuster & Soraya Lassal		3&2	Chrissie Sheedy & Mary Murray
Jan Bernet & Yago Izquierdo		Tied	Brian McCarthy & Ajay Barrett
Marti Luja & Clara Martinez	3&2		Nathan Cronin & Joe Franklin
Biel Cababes & Nil Artigas	5&4		Jack McShane & Peadar O'Toole
Singles			
Gloria Ruiz		Tied	Ger Ward
Ma Angels Taulats		2&1	Chrissie Sheedy
Martha Fuster	4&3		Breda White
Marta Cucurull	4&3		Mary Murray
Soraya Lassal	1up		Paula Lynch
Conchi Carballo	3&2		Glenda Hoey
Biel Cabanes	4&3		Peadar O'Toole
Clara Martinez	3&2		Nathan Cronin
Yago Izquierdo	4&4		Brian McCarthy
Marti Luja		Tied	Ajay Barrett
Jan Bernet		1up	Joe Franklin
Nil Artigas		3&2	Jack McShane

International Pairs @ Saint Cebria, Catalonia



It was joy of the Cork pair of John Walsh and Denis O'Sullivan in the International Pair event played in Saint Cebria in Catalonia on October 20-22, as they claimed the 2023 title with a final total of 25 under par. A very popular event with a large Irish contingent entered, John and Denis would finish the championship one ahead of Catalan duo Daniel Gimenez Hearnandez and Xavier Ponsdomenech with another Catalan pairing of Rafael Ramos Merino and Sergi Arisa Saez a further shot back in third place.

The Cork men held a two stroke lead heading into the final round on Sunday thanks to a brilliant 11 under in the Greensome format which they followed up a 6 under in the Foursomes, a total of 17 under, from the chasing Catalan pairings of Hearnandez/Ponsdomench and Ramos/Saez. The next best of the Irish challengers would be Bruff's Tommy Hanley and Kieran Earls who played on the Friday and sat on 10 under heading into Sunday. It would be a nip and tuck affair between the top three teams on Sunday with the format being Fourball and very little to separate them.

However using all their experience the two Cork men shot an excellent round of 8 under par when the pressure was on and that was good enough to seal the win for John and Denis as both their nearest rivals fell marginally short despite both shooting rounds of nine under each on the final day. Tommy Hanley and Kieran Earls would be the next best of the Irish finishing in fifthth spot with a total of 20 under par, one shot ahead of Evan Carry and Gareth Walsh who took sixth spot on 19 under par.

Congratulate to John and Denis on their win adding further Irish success in this particular event.

World Pitch & Putt Tour Ireland Masters @ Ringcommon, Dublin



The World Pitch & Putt Tour (WPPT) made its debut stop in Ireland on October 20-23 played in Ringcommons in Dublin and it was victory for Lucan's Damien Creevey who shot a brilliant total of 23 under to lift title. The event which was a 54 hole strokeplay event saw the field predominately made up of Irish players with only small number of international players making the trip on this occasion. Ringcommons presented their course in brilliant condition and the scoring and play certainly delivered a very competitive event.

The first 36 holes of play were played on both Friday and Saturday with the final round of 18 holes on the Sunday and it was Damien who stamped this authority on this competition come the end of play on Saturday as he stood five clear of the chasing field having returned a brilliant 36 hole of 18 under par which included an exception 11 under for his second 18. Next best after 36 holes was Ian Dillon (St Bridgets) and Tadhg Harrington (Portmarnock) on



13 under with Jason Larkin (Portmarnock) and Denis O'Sullivan (Douglas) a further shot back on 12 under. A small ladies field would see international player Pilar Montero and Collins's Sarah O'Neill separated by only a shot heading into Sunday on 10 and 11 over respectively where both ladies would fight it out for the gold and silver. Irish players would fill the Top 30 places heading into Sunday but advantage would certainly lie with the experienced Dublin Intercounty player Damien Creevey with the chasing pack needed to shoot very low.

Come Sunday there would be no mistakes from Damian Creevey who shot a 5 under par final round on to win with a 54-hole aggregate of 139 (23 under par). Second place overall went to Denis O'Sullivan who shot 6 under on Sunday against a 5 under par from Ian Dillon after they both finished on 18 under with Denis taking second on best final 18. Pilar Montero (Catalonia) captured the ladies title on 17 over ahead of Sarah O'Neill with fellow Irish player Patsy Quinlan in third. Tadhg Harrington was best in the Over 55 category, shooting 50 on Sunday for 17 under par overall with Anthony Malone and John McDermott second and third respectively in the seniors' category.

Congratulation to Damien on this maiden win on the WPPT and to the Ringcommons club on being excellent hosts.

Interview with Tadhg Harrington by John Manning

Tadhg Harrington ignored Pitch and Putt for half a century, but his passion for the sport is unbridled, since his return a couple of years back.

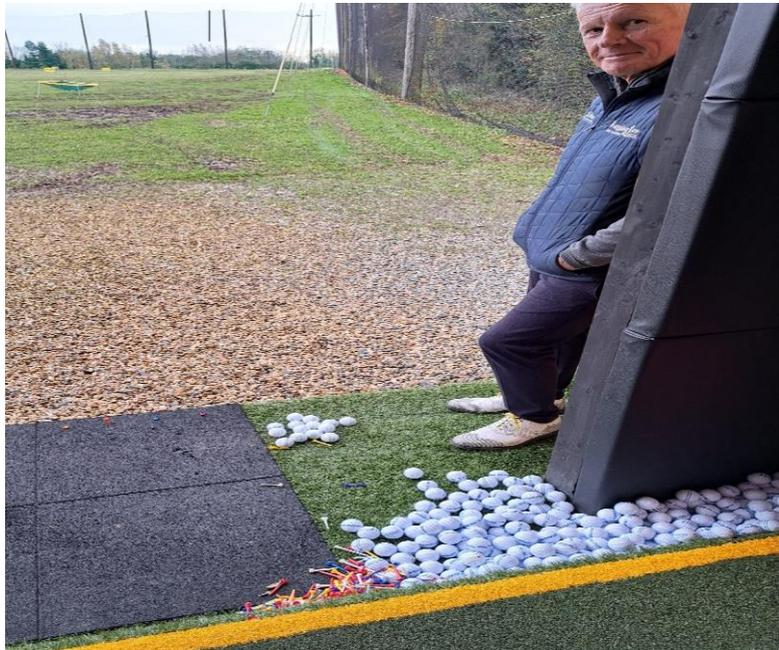
"I played Pitch and Putt 50 years ago in Ballyboden (Good Counsel), a fabulous Pitch & Putt course. We played The Creek as well and some other par-3 type courses around Rathfarnham," reminisced Tadhg, as we chatted over a coffee at his state-of-the-art golf facility near Swords. "We all played, all the brothers, including Padraig (the three-time golf major champion)".

So what was the catalyst for the Damascene conversion?

It was Covid-time and I had given up playing golf. I was teaching full-time I was building the academy (Harrington Golf Academy at the Drynam Centre) here and I was working 12 to 14 hour days. I didn't have time or the inclination to play golf – hadn't played for three years. When Covid passed, one of my clients asked me to come for a game of Pitch & Putt in Fairview CY. I'd no idea where Fairview CY was and I had no interest in playing Pitch & Putt!" declared Tadhg. I said 'no'. He kept at me and I agreed one day to go out and play. I played with Geraldine Edwards (Club Chairperson) and Derek Murtagh (Secretary). I'm still playing with them. I played with them yesterday. Derek does a lot of good work on the course. That was in October 2021. I still have the card. I had nine threes and nine fours. I couldn't get over how many good shots I played that hit the small greens and bounced off them. I didn't make one two. I said 'That was a nice day out and I'll leave it at that. But of course, the competitive spirit kicked-in and I said 'I'll have to have another go at that. I went up and played again and I became utterly and completely bitten by the bug. I played a bit better the second time and soon I joined Fairview CY – there was a deal going following Covid. As I progressed and the more I played the game, I became fascinated by it."

The man who caddied for his brother all through the latter's amateur career was immediately won over by one of our sport's key advantages.

"It was short. It would take an hour. It didn't take the day. It was very feasible to play Pitch & Putt even though I was busy in work. The biggest problem I had for the first six months was that I hit lots of good shots on to greens that just spun back. I couldn't control the ball. I tried every type of wedge (60 degrees – you name it) under the sun. At this stage, I started to get interested. I was originally given a handicap of seven and I said I thought it was too high.



They said 'go ahead and prove that it's too high. I said one day in the clubhouse over tea. This is a very easy game. I'll adapt to it.'" Noteverybody was convinced. A member of CY who was nearby bet me €1,000 for charity that I wouldn't be down to scratch within one year. This was two years ago. I was officially registered and I said I'd be down to scratch within one year. I put a Pitch & Putt mat in the bay in the academy so that I could practice. If I hit shot every day I'll be able to get good. I found it very easy to get down to three or four. I got down to that quickly but I didn't understand at the time the skill level involved and how good the good players are. I'd since joined Seapoint.

There is method to the number of clubs Tadhg has joined in his relatively short sojourn in the sport.

"My plan of action was what type of courses are there? There's a massive difference between Rocklodge, Fairview CY, Old County, take those three and say, Lucan or Glenville. Then you have Seapoint and Portmarnock. I felt I should join these different clubs. My thinking on being in five or six was to try and improve my game. If I had my choice, I'd say McDonagh is a very good training ground if you want to be a Championship player but it's not in Dublin and it's a little too far away. I found Portmarnock to be very specialized. It's a superb course but it's too 'linksy'. It's unique. Seapoint is a bit more Pitch & Putt. Portmarnock is more golf. I had a good time in Glenville, learnt a lot, but found it difficult to get to play enough. I'm now in three (clubs). Fairview CY is important. It's so small.

Pitching needs to be so skillful there. It's where I started. I'll never leave it. Lucan, championship course, Seapoint, links. Play in the best courses to improve your game. I have registered with Lucan from a team aspect. Lucan have so many very good players. If you want to improve your game – it's the place to be. I'm now down to three and found that easy. Now came the tricky part. I found it extremely difficult to consistently keep shooting good scores. My technique wasn't good enough. I was hitting too many good shots and the ball spinning back to the edge of the green. Instead of having a four foot putt, I had a ten foot putt. It took me six months solid of hitting balls to learn to hit up on the ball (which you have to do in Pitch & Putt rather than down on the ball (as in golf).

That's a massive sea change. It took me six months and can now hit both shots. I looked it up there I have now hit balls 465 days in a row. The hard work paid off. I got down to Scratch within eleven months. I won my bet and he paid to charity!"

Elite Pitch & Putt performers have beaten a path to Drynam's door.

"I started to get a few phone calls from the better players and I befriended many of them. I've had 16 of the Top 25 rated players up here (at the Academy). The list includes reigning National Strokeplay champion Stephen Shoer (who was visiting later the same day to talk putting), European Strokeplay kingpin Cahill (due the following Monday) and Damien Fleming. An awful lot of the better players started to ask me about putting. By meeting and playing with these players I realized how good they were. I got to see them at first hand and play with them. By watching them and videoing them, I learned a lot myself. The attitude of the cream of the crop reflects Pitch & Putt's image as the friendly sport. Every one of them has been super, super helpful in describing what they do, explaining as far as they could. As

a community, Pitch & Putt people (at the top end anyway) are much more giving than in golf. It's vice versa. I would get something from them too, about pitching, how to take spin off shots, technical stuff."

Tadhg sees benefits both of the long-established Pitch and Putt Coaching system and the golfschool environment.

"Coaches going to different clubs to teach them the basics is good. Getting the basic coaching is important as is the etiquette but after that you can't beat going out with your friends and cutting loose in groups. George McGreal and Stephen Murray are very good friends of mine. That's what they did. Out early in the morning, go round and round and round. It's a great way to learn - seeing what other players are doing it. How do they do X, Y and Z? I'm mimicking what they're doing."

We spoke a week or so after the Leinster v. Munster clash at McDonagh. In contrast to some of the interprovincial players who were bedeviled by excessive backspin, Sean Goggin and John Cahill were stopping the ball dead on the greens.

"Cahill was using his push shot," explained Tadhg, "imparting very little spin on the ball. That's the type of thing you see at the top level. It looks like they're hitting the same shot all the time, but they're not. They make subtle adjustments."

Perhaps paradoxically for a man who has spent a lifetime in golf, Tadhg believes Pitch & Putt is a more skillful game.

"Go out and play with Fleming, Goggin or Kieran Earls etc., then you'll see the skill level involved. And he also pans an age-old axiom. "I hear this a lot. 'You should take up Pitch & Putt. It's good for your short game.' That's rubbish! It's the exact opposite!. Great advantages are time and money. All you need is a good second-hand wedge and putter and off you go."

Tadhg is a proponent of using three clubs.

"It's not the distance element; it's the spinelement. Imagine if you had a club that gave you no spin uphill and another that gave you lotsof spin downhill. More and more players are going to be using three clubs. The club I'm using now is a 56 degree. Most of the players are around that. Ian Dillon uses a 52. If sticking to one pitching club, learn to manipulate it, take speed off the ball. Somebody playing Pitch & Putt with a 60 degree doesn't know what they're doing!"

I love it," says Tadhg of his role with Dublin County Board. "I'm PRO- I help 'Skinner' a little with the competitions. I'm very much involved with the ten clubs - I would know everybody in those clubs and I played in all the Opens this year. Results and pictures are what people love to see. I've found a great way to give something back. There's a lot of work in it but if you enjoy the game, you don't mind giving back. I've got unbelievable pleasure out of Pitch and Putt. I love it."

In addition to the active Dublin Pitch & Putt Facebook page, Harrington hopes to continue to enhance newspaper coverage of Pitch & Putt along with sharing the Dublin City Anna Livia radio slot with John-Ross Crangle.

"If we're going to be taken seriously, we need greater funding. What they're trying to do now with a CEO and a structured professional board with a marketing person and a finance person will help."

Harrington won the WPPT Ireland Masters O55 tournament in October.

"Ringcommons was the first time I felt comfortable. I was like a deer in the headlights at Riverdale but it helped me for Ringcommons. It's all a progression and getting used to playing with the top players and shooting the scores under pressure. I met a lady in Portmarnock, Suzanne Jordan. Suzanne said she'd love to improve. She was off nine at the time. I started playing with her in Foursomes – we decided we'd play in all the Open Mixed competitions. She's down to four now and recently shot 45 Gross in Seapoint the joint lowest gross score every shot there by a lady. We won 11 Opens in a row – they were all on different courses and in different conditions I got to play courses I would never have played – like Dunshaughlin and Rathfeigh. It gave me a great feel for what the guys have experienced. I'm trying to catch up 20/30 years on the others."

As well as his generous sponsorship of Dublin County Board, Tadhg is doing his bit for charity.

"Alan Devaney (Lough Owel) was doing some great work. I'd never met him. I contacted him initially on Facebook and told him I've a few vouchers here and do you want them for the charity? I'd won the vouchers in Opens during 2022. Then Christmas Day last year, Alan's 12/13 year-old daughter was distributing Christmas dinners to those in need. I rang him and told him. 'Anything that we win, we'll give you. So I said to Suzanne, 'I'll teach you for free, but anything you win we give to charity' and she was delighted. We're on course to give Alan €2,000 this year. It's heartwarming. He raises so much money for the Lions Club and his own charity."

61 years of age, Harrington is two years into his five year Pitch & Putt progression plan. His ambitions are, "to compete at national level, make the Dublin team and be oldest player in the Inter-County." Although a hugely positive PRO, Tadhg doesn't see Dublin redressing the steady loss of Pitch and Putt clubs and courses experienced over the past 20 years. "I think it's going to go the other way. Two clubs are struggling to get Committees. There are five or six very strong clubs. They will always be in business. I fear for two or three. Streaming action like the last round at Riverdale, the Inter-County at Lucan and the Matchplay at St. Bridget's or getting even five or ten minutes on television would showcase the sport and would generate Newspaper magazine coverage."

As a golfing guru who studied at the Titleist Performance Institute in California, Harrington is beguiled by the prospect of golfing greats taking on Pitch and Putt's top performers (a la Shane Lowry v. Tracey McGrath a number of years ago).

"It would be very interesting if Pdraig and Shane played Damien Fleming and say Ray Murphy, John Cahill or Kieran Earls. I would have no doubt that if they played, Fleming and whoever would win. It's a pure numbers game. If you put them around Rocklodge, Fleming and Murphy, on a bad day would shoot 40. Now you're saying to Pdraig and Shane 'shoot 39'. That's a lot harder to do than it sounds! From what I've seen of the top class players

they would beat Padraig and Shane at the moment but give Padraig and Shane six months – they would adapt!”

Tadhg kindly showed me round the Academy (where the latest golf video and computer technology abound) and I saw at first hand where he did most of his practice. Nets and flags are placed at strategic Pitch & Putt distances, 30 metres, 40 metres, 50 metres. Harrington sees the 30-40 metre range as absolutely critical. If one can master that, the rest will follow. His practice regime is disciplined and focused, sometimes accompanied by his faithful dog, Cooper.

“I have two four or five different targets. I hit them in batches of 10 or 20 balls. I do a little and often between lessons.” Harrington eschews much chipping practice. “I’m good at it!” he insists. “At the top level, a bad shot is in the fringe. I do a lot of putting here and at home on the carpet with a simple gate, a laser and a few other bits and pieces. I can give the time that’s necessary. I’ll practice every day for five years.

That’s some commitment. But it’s already bearing fruit!

2024 International Fixtures by John Manning

2024 promises to be an exciting year on the international Pitch & Putt front. John Manning takes a look at what awaits next season in the following piece.

There probably won't be many Irish entrants in the II World Pairs Championship on 22th-24th March at the Estadio Espanol and Club Medico courses in Santiago de Chile, Chile. The World Pairs was last played in 2017 when it was won by Bruff pair Liam O'Donovan and Pacelli Darcy.

The usual Irish contingent will be out in force two weeks though later at the Catalan Open, from 5th-7th April in Costa Daurada. Another Bruff duo, Liam O'Donovan and Thomas Hanley are former winners. Tracey McGrath (Erry) won the successive Catalan Opens of 2008 and 2009.

Ray Murphy and Darren Collins (St. Annes), Ian Farrelly (Bellewstown) and John Walsh (Collins) have triumphed on Dutch soil before so the International Gelders Open on 19th-21st April at Strand Horst, the Netherlands will attract plenty of Irish interest.

There is a Basque Open on 17th-19th May at Urduña where Bryan Delaney, James Cleary, John Cahill, Thomas Hanley, John-Ross Crangle and Eamon Gibney helped Ireland to the 2018 European championship followed by the Andorra Open on 14th-16th June.

The IV World Strokeplay Championship (27th-30th June at the Vigo course in Galicia, Spain) has been long awaited. The last World Strokeplay Championship (before the pandemic intervened) was held in 2017. Liam O'Donovan (Bruff) won that event at Imjelt (Norway) while John Walsh (Collins) was victorious in the 2013 championship at Tambre, just 125 kilometres from the 2024 host venue. Chrissie Byrne (Ryston) won the first two World Ladies Strokeplay championships (2009 and 2013) and Eleanor Walsh (Fermoy) triumphed at Imjelt six years ago.

The Five Nations Tournament, on 12th-14th July, again at Urduña, will not involve Ireland but the 2024 renewal of the biennial Irish Open on 19th-21st July at Ryston, Newbridge, Co. Kildare will see plenty of Irish hopefuls. Eleanor Walsh (Fermoy) will defend the Irish Ladies Open that she won at Tullamore in 2022 while Castletown's Evan Carry is the reigning Gents' champion. Anthony Galvin (Tullamore) will bid to hold on to his Over 55s crown.

The focus will again be on Galicia for their Open from 23rd-25th August at the new Compostela course. John Walsh and Liam O'Donovan are former winners of the Galicia Open.

There will be a Slovenia Open in Ljubljana from 30th August/1st September while the Nacho Prada Memorial Galician International Pairs will take place from 4/6 October over the Ourense and Pozo do Lago courses in Spain.

Ireland won the 2008, 2012 and 2016 World Cups and Covid has dictated that the 2024 event will be the first World Cup for eight years so Ireland will put their title on the line at El Vendrell, south of Barcelona from 11th-13th October.

The Catalan International Pairs on 18/20 October at SantCebrià, Spain will see a title defence by John Walsh (Collins) & Denis O'Sullivan (Douglas) who claimed the 2023 title last October. Other previous Irish victors in this event have been Liam O'Donovan and Pacelli Darcy (in 2014) along with Thomas Hanley and Kieran Earls (Bruff) two years later.

Dates are still to be announced for the 2024 Brittany and Australian Opens and for the WPPT circuit.



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