

# BACKSPIN

Official E-Zine of the Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland

July, 2016



## Issue Highlights:

- Ireland are World Cup Winners
- PJ Bell Winners
- Ladies Strokeplay Preview
- Plus Much More...

A Chara,

You are very welcome to this the second edition of Backspin for 2016. While this edition is out a little later than originally intended we've decided to combine it with a look ahead to Sunday's National Ladies Strokeplay Championships in St Stephens to give a bit of depth to the edition.

While our singles provincial champions have been crowned in both Matchplay and Strokeplay, we've decided to focus on the national and indeed international picture in this edition. There is a profile of the PJ Bell Memorial Competition winners from Lakeside back in May along with the thoughts of the winners from last weekend's National Seniors Strokeplay Championships in Fermoy in both the Ladies and the Gents events. Mark Keohane also looks back on Ireland's successful retention of the World Cup title in Andorra at the start of this month which was our third consecutive victory in the tournament.

As everyone knows our recent National Matchplay Championships featured **(continued on page 21)**



*2016 World Cup winning captain Eamonn Gibney (Castletown) lifts the trophy at Ireland's recent World Cup win in Andorra alongside teammates JR Crangle (Loughlinstown) and John Walsh (Collins). The Irish team were co-managed by Michael Murphy (Royal Meath) & Mark Keohane (Rocklodge).*

# St. Stephen's Pitch & Putt Club. Cork

By John Manning

**Ahead of it's hosting of the National Ladies Strokeplay Championships Sunday 24th July, John Manning profiles the St Stephens club in Cork, one he is very familiar with himself!**

In the 1930s and 1940s, the then deadly disease of tuberculosis was rampant in Ireland. It was decided to build extra hospitals (called sanatoria) to care for the critically-sick patients. The Southern Regional Hospital in Cork (later to be known as St. Stephen's) was one such establishment. After acquisition of land at Sarsfield's Court (once the home of the Sarsfield family, relatives of Patrick Sarsfield – the first Earl of Lucan), the hospital was officially opened in 1955 by the then Minister for Health, Mr. Tom O'Higgins. As the TB threat abated, emphasis at St. Stephen's over the years switched more to the care of psychiatric and geriatric patients.

St. Anne's Pitch and Putt club was set up in the grounds of St. Anne's Hospital (Shanakiel) on the Northside of Cork city in 1966. With just eight miles between St. Anne's and St. Stephen's and both hospitals under the

control of Cork Health Authority and the Southern Health Board, attention focused on whether the Shanakiel project could be replicated.

St. Stephen's Pitch and Putt club was formed in 1972. There was a significant hospital presence on the first committee with Peg Barrett as Chairman and Fr. (later Archdeacon), Sean Burke as President and Mary J. O'Connor (Lady Captain). Fr. Burke had been one of the prime movers behind the formation of St. Stephen's and was a very keen and competent player in the early years. Also on that very first Committee was current Club Chairman Des Crowley. Des is one of the most experienced administrators in the sport, having served two productive terms as Cork County Board Chairman. Des embodies the ethos of the founding fathers and is deservedly an honorary club member for his services to St. Stephen's. Hospital influence is less these days but an entente cordiale exists between club and landlord.

The first major win for St. Stephen's came in the 1974 Golden Vale Trophy, a Munster provincial team tournament

of the era. That was at the iconic Gleneagles course in Killarney. Jim Ahern (now heavily involved with Collins club) played on that St. Stephen's quartet as did Tony Dunlea and Jim Lotty (R.I.P.) A Cork Junior League win in 1978 was followed by the intermediate and junior double in 1979 and a third junior crown in a row in 1980. Beating the then mighty Carraigaline in the 1984 senior league final was a standout moment in the club's history. The Ladies' juniors won that year as well and St. Stephen's was to continue to annex Cork league titles down the years as well as gath-

ering many victories in the popular North East Cork leagues.

Mairead Manning and Glenn Towler represented the club on Cork graded inter-county teams in 2015. Matt Cuthbert and Mary Daly were Cork inter-county players in the past. Bernard Palmer and Esther Aherne won St. Stephen's first national title when they were successful in the 1983 National Mixed Foursomes at R.G.S.C. Mary Daly and her son Alan won this title at Collins just last year. Brian Allen was the National Juvenile Strokeplay champion at Tullamore in 2002.



2016 National Matchplay Champions Ger Ward (Portmarnock) and Shane Murphy (Raffeen Creek) with PPUI President Mervyn Cooney. Ger won her 10th National Matchplay title with Shane winning his first at the Seapoint course in Co Louth

Ger Condon won the Munster Strokeplay in 1993. Other provincial winners from St. Stephen's were Clint O'Keeffe and Mairead Manning. St. Stephen's sits on an elevated site although the course itself is relatively flat. The testing course is open to the elements and is regularly buffeted by strong winds. The well-maintained layout enjoys great support from the local community in Glanmire. A synergy between Cork city dwellers and Glanmire locals has been a feature of the club since its inception. St. Stephen's has a loyal core of members that makes it one of Leaside's leading clubs.

The course has hosted many County and Munster championships. The National Mixed Foursomes was contested at St. Stephen's in 1993 – the club's first national event. Leading Co. Offaly administrator Annie Galvin triumphed with her son Paul. The club played host to the Skoda National Mixed Team Event in the Millennium year. Parteen were the winners. An exciting play-off between St. Anne's club-mates Darren Collins (the eventual champion) and Frank Dineen was the highlight of a memorable July weekend in 2004 when the National

Gent's Strokeplay was played at St. Stephen's. Niall Lenihan (Collins) and Donnacha O'Leary (Dunmanway) took the Intermediate and Junior titles respectively.

Most of the original St. Stephen's greens remain although the routing of the course has changed somewhat over the years. That's certainly true of the signature 12th. Termed "Eye of the Needle", the tee-shot here must find a path through the trees to a green with many subtle rolls. The access roads through the hospital play their part in the course set-up, particularly at the 52 metre 6th. This one can play very long if the wind is against. Index 1 is the 68 metre "Goliath". The hole plays slightly downhill and the ball will usually kick right. Trees line the left hand side of the fairway and birdies won't come easy here.

The eponymously titled 16th, "Saddam", poses a difficult pitch over a dominant bunker, which guards the target. The green slopes away as well as only a perfect pitch will reap dividends.

# 2016 Seniors—Winner Profiles

By John Manning

**AFTER their respective victories in Fermoy on the weekend of 16th & 17th July, John Manning spoke to the six winners across the six Ladies and Gents grades at the National Seniors Strokeplay Championships last weekend.**

Breda Lonergan- Tipperary Hills, Senior Ladies Winner

“I'm thrilled to have won,” purrs Breda Lonergan of her latest feat – winning the National Over 55s Ladies Senior Strokeplay Championship at the first attempt. Sheelagh Elmes and Mary Donnelly, both National Strokeplay winners themselves, were able playing partners for doughty Breda's superbly played 98 at Fermoy on Saturday 16th July.

Even this wily and experienced competitor encountered the burden of some butterflies as she approached the finishing line. “I felt a bit of pressure near the end, I think it was the fear of losing!” One stroke ahead after 18 holes on six under, Breda was chasing the clubhouse target of 100 set by Shandon's Maree O'Toole. For Breda, PPUI couldn't have picked a

better venue for her debut in the seniors' ranks. “I love Fermoy - it's my second favourite course,” says the loyal Tipperary Hills stalwart of the club, which is home to her great friend and rival Eleanor Walsh.

Surely this victory will be further motivation for the main National Ladies Strokeplay and Strokeplay championships, for which Breda is still a realistic challenger? “I've always contended in the Matchplay and Strokeplay,” avers Breda, who has won the primary Ladies Strokeplay and Ladies Matchplay in the past as well as being a runner-up in both formats (the Strokeplay as far back as 1978). “I would have loved to have played Seapoint (in the National Matchplay finals). But in the qualifying I lost on the 36th to Martha (O'Brien) in Cashel.” Breda tees it up at St. Stephen's in the Strokeplay and no doubt will be back at the business end of the Matchplay in 2017.

Mary Murray- Rocklodge, Intermediate Ladies Winner

Mary Murray has been a perennial contender in the National Intermediate

Ladies Strokeplay in in the past - 2nd in 2011 and 3rd in 2013 along with two other top six placings. There had been a Mixed Foursomes minor placing and an Inter-County win with Cork but the lack of a national individual title rankled. Mary made no mistake in the 2016 National Over 55s intermediate Stroke play championship. "I had to turn 55 then to win something!" laughed Mary as she recalled her Fermoy masterpiece.

The Rocklodge lady's eight par under 100 is the lowest ever winning score in the National Over 55s Ladies Intermediate Strokeplay championship - by

10 shots! "It's the best score I've ever done. The course was in fabulous condition," is how the former Riverside member describes her remarkable performance. Mary's winning margin of 14 shots is the biggest ever in the history of the National Ladies Over 55s championships. "I was a bit nervous at the start and had four fours in the first 18," reflects the new champion. Her 51 was still good enough for a four stroke halfway cushion.

"I was delighted. I concentrated for the first time for the whole time." That consistent focus produced a no bogey 49 final round and clinched her run-



2016 National Seniors Ladies: Intermediate winner Mary Murray (Rocklodge), Senior winner Breda Lonergan (Tipperary Hills) and Junior winner Dina Dillon (St. Bridget's)

way win. Fermoy's Jean Clancy was second. There's unfinished business at national level, however. "I would love to win the Strokeplay to be honest," says Mary, who was also third in the National Junior Strokeplay at Douglas in 2005.

The next opportunity will be the 2016 National Intermediate Strokeplay championship. "I was senior and I loved the challenge of playing the seniors but there's senior plus! I've been playing in so many different things up and down the country but (although it's in Cork) St. Stephen's, we don't seem to play it too much. I've been practising hard in St. Stephen's and I hope for the best on Sunday."

Dina Dillon- St Bridgets, Junior Ladies Winner

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Dina Dillon of St. Bridget's is ecstatic about her Fermoy heroics. "I feel so happy that I won my first major title." A new record 117 gave Dina the 2016 National Over 55s Ladies Junior Strokeplay crown.

It was one of those dream days. "I was pitching very well and the putting went well also." Dina trailed by a stroke after 18 but a carefully played 60 second time gave her a two shot winning margin over Noreen Ryan (Fermoy). Dina thoroughly enjoyed her 36 holes in the company of Ann Wall of Cunnigar and Fermoy's own Terry Cleary. The revered north Cork layout gets the thumbs-up. "The course was great to play on. It suited my game well and it is always in great condition." A regular face in the gallery when St. Bridget's and Kildare players are contending, Dina is now reaping some deserved rewards after her 30 years playing the game.

A Kildare Matchplay champion last year, Dina is particularly grateful to her supporters at Fermoy - Mary and Liam Sherry, Evelyn Miller, Paddy and Esther Martin and Bernie Dunne.

Wally Sheridan- Bellewstown, Gents Senior Winner

"I never played Fermoy before. I just went down on the day." A typically phlegmatic Wally Sheridan approach! Wally becomes the third two-time win-

ner of the National Over 55s Senior Strokeplay championship (after Anthony Malone and Pat Greene).

“I only had to chip three times and I chipped-in once,” laughs Wally. That works. Winner at Gaeil Colmcille a couple of years ago, Wally's score of 90 at Fermoy is the best all-time scoring aggregate for the National Over 55s senior Strokeplay (breaking his own record). Some top class players trailed in his wake, Sean Minogue (Riverdale) taking second on the tie-breaker. Although he hadn't previously seen it, Wally loved Fermoy immediately. “It was in super condition and it suited me because I love fast greens.”

Nineteen twos and just a single bogey for a four stroke win bear this out. “Fermoy and Bellewstown are the two best courses I played all year,” ventures this staunch Meath man.

The new shot gun start approach gets the latest two-time champion's seal of approval. “Absolutely brilliant. Everybody was finished at the same time. We teed off at exactly 1.30. There were no hold-ups. I left Fermoy at 6pm and was home shortly after 8pm. I'm still off +2,” beams Wally proudly. Why wouldn't he be? His brace of Over 55 senior championships and his National Mixed Foursomes tri-



2016 National Seniors Gents @ Fermoy. PPUi President Mervyn Cooney, Intermediate winner Charlie Egan (Erins Isle), Junior winner Martin VerBeek (Lough Owel) and Senior winner William Sheridan (Bellewstown).



umph have added further lustre to a productive career, Leinster Strokeplay and Matchplay victories, provincial and National Inter-County success and an international cap at the 2010 European Team championship at Lloret Papalus.

Charlie Egan- Erins Isle Intermediate Strokeplay Winner

"I don't know where it came from to be honest!" is Charlie Egan's modest assessment of his tour de force at Fermoy in the All Ireland Over 55s Intermediate Strokeplay. By his own admission Charlie's year had got off to a slow start, with some sockets!

"I didn't re-join until March," admits the man who finished runner-up to Anthony Malone in last year's senior championship at Old County. Re-graded as a result of the new handicap system, Charlie becomes the second Erin's Isle player in a row to win the National Over 55s Intermediate Strokeplay Championship. Charlie's score of 93 is a new all-time record scoring aggregate for the Over 55s Inter Strokeplay championship. Assiduous preparation paid off for the genial Erin's Isle player, who speaks very passionately about all things Pitch & Putt. "I hadn't

played Fermoy before so I went down to practise. We stayed overnight and I played a few rounds. Then I was off last week. I woke up early on Wednesday and drove down for a day trip."

Charlie played beautifully on the day in a group that included 2014 champion William McNally (Stackallen). There was no sign of those early season jitters. "Fermoy course was set up for a score. Granted the greens are large but I was on all but three or four of them." And with the hunger of the true competitor, Charlie felt he could have scored even better. "I missed four putts from around two feet!" He didn't need them and finished four clear of Christy Hannon, who was runner-up for the second successive year.

Martin Verbeek- Lough Owel, Junior Gents Winner

"I couldn't believe that I had won. it was a strange and very happy feeling." Martin Verbeek considers his one stroke victory in the National Over 55s Gents Junior Strokeplay Championship.

Building on Ed Janssen's podium performance last year, Martin becomes the first Dutch native to claim an Irish championship. The significance is not lost on Martin, who fired a brilliant second round 49 to claim his historic triumph. "I am very proud to be the first overseas winner." Due recognition is granted to the original Dutch pioneer. "Ed Janssen is the man who brings us to Ireland. I am happy that he did," laughs Martin, who finished a single stroke ahead of Thomas King (Loughlinstown).

Martin thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and recorded another milestone. "The Fermoy course was magnificent. I am glad to bring the first national title to my home course Lough Owel. Special thanks to the

PPUI who make it possible to play such a great game." Martin, Ed and their other Dutch comrades Karl Gattinger and Dirk Gameren made maximum use of their latest trip to the Emerald Isle. "During the weekend we played St Anne's, Bruff and Tipp Hills, all great courses. Special thanks also to Ian Leech who took us to the courses and supported us at Fermoy. All the Irish players were great the whole weekend."

Martin will be back to seek a double in 2017. "I am sure that I will come over next year to defend the title." But he'll take to the skies again before then. "Next trip to Ireland will be the Short-grass!" Martin signs-off with thanks to all his Irish friends. And that's a growing number.



**PPUI Youth Officer Noel Collins presents Munster u-16 Matchplay trophy to Glenn Towler (St. Anne's) after defeating Cillian Courtney (Deerpark) at the Deerpark course in Kerry.**

# World Cup V - Xixerella Park, Andorra

By Mark Keohane

## *Co-Manager of the Irish World Cup Team Mark Keohane reflects on our triumph in Andorra*

*The scene is the 18th green, Ireland lead Catalonia 2 – 1. John Walsh is one down with one to play and Eamon Gibney is one up on the last and has secured a par with an incredible putt across the length of the green. Marc Lloret has a long breaking putt to win the hole and halve the match. He strikes a super putt that barely reaches the top of the slope and falls over turning hole bound but suddenly it straightens and Michael Murphy is jumping for joy! Ireland win the World Cup, a strange feeling of relief and emotion wash over me. JR Crangle and myself hug and the eyes are not dry, we swamp Eamon on the green as the celebrations start, but this tale started out six long days earlier at 4am in Dublin Airport where we met to begin our journey to glory.*

*A seven strong party left these shores with the World Cup and in no mood to return without it, after a 12-hour journey we arrived in Andorra, dropped the bags in the hotel and headed for the course, the three lads were determined to play one round even though they were tired and weary, this determination from the team set the tone for the week. Xixerella Park is located in a fantastic setting with the Pyrenees as a backdrop with snow glistening on the highest peaks, the front nine is a very Irish type layout with shorter holes but tricky none the less. The lads were very concerned about the distance the ball was flying but we put it down to tiredness and they began to adjust. The back nine is reached after*

*around a kilometre of a walk down a wooded path and that first evening it seemed even longer. The back nine is more continental in flavour with longer shots to big greens which have numerous slopes, still practice done we headed for a shower, some food and I insisted on the obligatory team bonding over a few local beverages, this in my eyes is very important to get everyone relaxed and ready.*

*The following two days brought nothing but practice and discussion on tactics and team placement, other nations arrived and were met and the talk was all about the upcoming battles. I must say the hospitality of the Andorrans is second to none and the friendliness of each team was readily apparent. Thursday morning's practice was conducted at 8.30am which was the starting time for Friday and one thing was readily apparent, the heat and altitude were having a big effect on both the players and the ball flight. The evening arrived and we dressed in our team colours for the opening ceremony, speeches and photographs notwithstanding. I for one was a very proud man to be introduced as part of Team Ireland alongside my four compatriots, to wear the National logo on your chest is something I will never take for granted or forget. Ceremony over, it was back to the hotel and early to bed, the real adventure was just hours away.*

*Well rested and raring to go the three lads teed off for the first of two stroke play rounds on Friday. The best 5 rounds combined would determine the seeding's for the weekends match play and from the off our lads took the competition by*



**Team Ireland at the Opening Ceremony of World Cup V in Andorra. The Irish team of Eamonn Gibney (Castletown. Captain), JR Crangle (Loughlinstown) and John Walsh (Collins) and managed by Michael Murphy (Royal Meath) & Mark Keohane (Rocklodge) ensured a third consecutive World Cup win for Ireland**

*the scruff of their combined necks and laid down a serious marker. Opening rounds of 50, 46 and 45 set the tone and had everyone agog with a mixture of surprise and fear. 11 shots clear with 18 holes to go, the second round was a different animal as greens dried out and got firm and fast and the temperature rose to 28 degrees. Water was consumed at ferocious rate and concentration was at a premium. Rounds of 51 and two 52's gave us a team total of -26 and comfortably seeded No 1. After a short break the quarter final against the Basques began, JR and Eamon quickly took control of their Foursomes and won easily. However, John struggled in the superhot conditions and eventually lost 2&1. 1-1 overnight but reasonably confident for the morning.*

*Saturday dawned bright and hot. 25 degrees at breakfast and we knew it would be tough. The three lads all won handily as we saw off the Basques 4&1 and then it was Galicia in the Semi Finals. Our neighbours from across the Irish Sea were taking on Catalonia in the other semi, we*

*took control of the match from the off and with 4&3 wins in both the Foursomes and Singles to lead 2-0. Lunch was very enjoyable, however a two and half hour wait in 30-degree heat ensued before the match resumed and it had an effect on all of us! John and Eamon both won tough games and a slightly out of sorts JR came up with a good half to see us through to the final where for the first time in a World Cup Final our opponents would be Catalonia. Back at the clubhouse the good natured ribbing began with the opposition and even if some of it was lost in translation they got the message. There were no late drinks that night I can assure you, the lads were focused on the following day's battle.*

*Once again Sunday dawned bright and hot and we were ready to go, at the course early to let the lads walk around and spot the fresh pins it was soon time to start, coin toss, photos and we were off, JR and Eamon took on Marc Lloret and Enric Sainz and John took on Josep Martinez. John got off to a hot start and never relinquished his lead*

to win comfortably but the Foursomes was a different matter. An early lead was whittled away on the back nine due in part to some fantastic play by the Catalonian pair but also some outlandish flukes which sometimes happen in Matchplay. We lost the game 2&1 and were one all at the break. Lunch was quiet and determined, singles placement was discussed and decided, JR at 1, Eamon at 2 and John at 3.

JR played Josep and with can only be described as unbelievable Pitch & Putt unless watched won 7&6. Weeshie Murphy described his play as simply awesome. 2-1 up and apparently cruising but not for long! John who was 3 up thru 9 was soon pegged back as Enric played flawlessly on the back nine and Eamon who was never behind was 4up early and back to 2up, missed a short putt on the 12th to go 3up and then the drama began in earnest. Marc won the 14th and Eamon was in the battle of his life. However, he was nothing but heroic and determined as he ground out four amazing pars under immense pressure in 31-degree heat to play a Captains part in winning the cup. John eventually lost 1down but it made no matter. A singles win from each man had secured the 5th World Cup and the hat trick of wins.

The joy as Eamon received the cup at the presentation cannot be described, but as someone who has been involved in Intercounty victory's and the feeling that brings, this was something out of this world, when I say the celebrations were long and hard I am not doing the night justice. I want to finish by thanking our two supporters Ryan Walsh and Weeshie Murphy for being there to help us, to my co manager Michael Murphy whose preparations were excellent and his wit and sense of humour boundless! I say thank you, to Mervyn Cooney for giving me the opportunity and to those back home who sent best wishes and congratulations. Finally, well done to Eamon Gibney, John Ross Crangle and John Walsh for their level of skill, determination and resolve and for simply letting me help out in my own small way I say thank you.

The 5th World Cup in Andorra is an experience I will not forget in my lifetime.

Eire Abu

Mark Keohane



Leinster / Ulster co-ordinator David Reddin with Leinster u-16 finalists Conor Cleere (Gowran, left) and Evan Carry (Castletown, Right). Evan went on to successfully retain his title at the Navan course in Co Meath

# 2016 National Ladies Strokeplay Finals

By Jason O'Connor

**ALTHOUGH** the action is condensed into one day due to the amount of entries, the National Ladies Strokeplay in St Stephens this weekend should still offer plenty in the way of excitement. There are 24 entries each in both the Senior and Junior grades with 18 entered in the Intermediate grade. **Communications & Press Officer Jason O'Connor takes a closer look at the field in advance of Sunday in Cork.**

Junior

Hopes of a local success will rest on the shoulders of two players in this grade on Sunday as Mairead Manning and Georgina Harte fly the flag for St Stephens in the day's entirety. Mairead just missed out on retaining the Munster Junior Strokeplay title in Hillview last month with the player who piped her that day in Bruff's Margaret O'Donovan also competing this weekend looking to build on her win. Last year's runner-up from Ringcommons, Tralee's Lisa O'Connor, returns looking to go one better with Fermoy's Theresa O'Keeffe her playing partner for the regulation 36 holes.

Leinster entries are low for this grade with just three. Leinster Junior Matchplay Semi-Finalist Audrey Donnelly of McBride, Stackallen's Margaret Muldoon and McDonagh's Emma Hanlon represent the eastern province on Sunday. 2014 runner-up in the grade Lily O'Brien will hope for another strong showing having finished second when the event was held at another Cork course in Fermoy. She tees-off with Michelle Flynn from the aforementioned club. The third place finisher from last weekend's Seniors event in Fermoy, Stella Kinsella of Cunnigar, is entered for the event and she will tee-off with Bruff's Hannah Ryan. Stella's Cunnigar club-mate Breda O'Donnell is a former winner of the Seniors event in this grade and she will tee-off with Tralee's Catriona O'Connor with Charlotte Blake and Aisling Quirke completing the Kerry club's representation of four.

Charlotte is paired with Ballinlough's Karen Aherne while Aisling will tee-off in the first two-ball with Ida O'Halloran as Ida will have the honour of hitting



**2016 National Ladies Matchplay @ Seapoint. Christine Byrne (St. Bridget's, Semi Finalist), Eleanor Walsh (Fermoy, Runner Up), PPUi President Mervyn Cooney, Ger Ward (Portmarnock, Winner) and Ger Holland (R.G.S.C., Semi Finalist). Ger Ward captures her 10th National Matchplay title.**

the first tee-shot of the day. Other entries in the grade include Lakeside duo Elaine Quinn and Josie McCormack, Collins' Nuala McNamara, ESB's Theresa Murphy, Cunnigar's Kathleen Foran and Jill O'Riordan of Inniscarra. The best eight after the initial 36 will qualify for the final 18 holes and hope to succeed Ringcommons' Ann Duffy as Champion.

#### Intermediate

In contrast to the Juniors both the Intermediates and Juniors on Sunday will play in three-balls with the only two Ladies amongst the 18 player field to have won the event paired together in the same three-ball. Defend-

ing champion Mary Quinn of Lakeside will play alongside 2005 winner Esther Martin of Ryston with Charleville's Liz Lysaght making up a quite illustrious three ball. Last year's runner-up in Ringcommons, Nicole Burke of Fermoy, returns and is paired with Hillview's Pauline Lucey and Collins' Phil Downey. Most of the focus will be on Rocklodge's Mary Murray however following her strong run of form in the past month.

The Munster Intermediate Stroke-play title (after a nine-hole playoff) was followed with the Seniors title in Fermoy only last Saturday and she will be hotly fancied to do well on an-

other Cork course. She plays with two former National Junior Strokeplay Champions in Shandon's Mary Fullam (2006) and Sarah O'Neill (2014) in the last of the six three balls for the grade. Fermoy's Ailish Sexton is another former winner of the Junior grade amongst the field (2012) and she tees off with both Rosscarbery's Catherine McCarthy and Laytown's Ann Bird. 2014 Runner-Up in Fermoy, Una Brosnan of Claycastle, returns hoping to make amends this year and add to her National Girls Strokeplay title from 2013. She tees off with RGSC's Carol Tracey and another Fermoy player in Geraldine O'Keeney.

The trio of ESB's Betty Murphy, Cunnigar's Lorraine Troy and Lakeside's Frances Ryan will get the grade underway as the top six after 36 will go forward for the Final 18 playoff.

### Senior

The big question in advance of Sunday is will Ger Ward do something she hasn't been able to do yet in her magnificent career, namely win three consecutive National Strokeplay titles? She's done the feat in the National Matchplay but she never has

managed to do so in Strokeplay and she finds herself playing a course she will be playing competitively for the first time on Sunday. After her success in Seapoint, the Leinster Strokeplay was annexed by the Portmarnock player in Rochfortbridge and she plays her 36 as part of an interesting three ball with the recently crowned National Seniors winner in Tipperary Hills' Breda Lonergan and former National Intermediate Strokeplay Champion Helen Greagsbey.

Breda won in Fermoy last Saturday at the first attempt in the Seniors grade so will feel confident about her chances in advance. The recent National Matchplay Runner-Up from Seapoint, Eleanor Walsh competes also this weekend, buoyed on by victory over Breda in the Munster Strokeplay in Hillview last month. The Fermoy player tees-off alongside the third place finisher in the Munsters in Paula Nolan as well as Glenda Hoey from RGSC. Fermoy's Sarah Byrne and Collins' duo Vera McCarthy and Siobhan Scannell make up the Cork representation on Sunday, Sarah teeing off beside 1999 winner Marian Courtney of St Bridgets and Lucan's



Phil Condon. Siobhan meanwhile tees off alongside Collinstown's Liz Quinn and another Siobhan in Siobhan Keely of RGSC. After reaching the semi-finals of the National Matchplay and having to make do with a fourth place finish last year, Chrissie Byrne will want to do a lot better this time out. She tees-off off with fellow Kildare player Mairead O'Toole of Poulaphouca (former National Intermediate Strokeplay Champion) and Barbara Furlong (former National Girls Strokeplay winner)

The other semi-finalist in the National Matchplay, Ger Holland of RGSC, will hit the first tee-shot in the grade and she has two former winners of the event for company in five-time winner Margaret Hogan of Tullamore and 1996 winner Rose Kelly of Ryston. Last year's second and third place finishers from Ringcommons are paired together, namely Sheelagh Elmes of Portmarnock (1995 winner) and Tara Dillon of St Bridgets who has come close to success on so many occasions after winning the Intermediate version back in 1996 and they tee-off in the last group with Claire Keely of RGSC. The field is completed by the

combination of former National Intermediate winners Pauline Balfe (Old County, 2011) and Ryston's Mary Donnelly (2014) who tee-off with Vera McCarthy.

With this being a new venue for the majority of the Ladies it will be interesting to see will it change the established order of winners, especially in the senior grade, as it promises to be an exciting day in St Stephens on Sunday. Remember the Top 8 will go forward for the Final 18 after the initial 36 is completed.

Remember to click into the PPUI website for updates on proceedings.



Engrossed in the action at the Leinster u-16 Matchplay @ Navan. Picture courtesy of Aidan Gibbons (Gowran).

# 2016 PJ Bell

By John Manning

## NATIONAL MIXED TEAM EVENT SPECIALISTS

John Manning profiles the 2016 PJ Bell winning side which once again came from the Cunnigar club in Dunganarvan.

So just how does a club select a title winning combination in the PJ Bell National Mixed Team Event? For Cunnigar 2016, the formula was very simple. Michael Aherne shares a house with Paul O'Riordan and Michelle O'Connell is Paul's girlfriend. "Good and enjoyable," laughs Cunnigar Club President Michael as he contemplated winning the 2016 PJ Bell Event at Lakeside on Saturday May 7th.

Cunnigar's return of 60 is the best winning total since the P.J. Bell National Mixed switched to the Scramble format. "2 12s gross," Michael succinctly summarises Cunnigar's winning effort. "We thought it wouldn't be enough! Scrambles are played regularly in Cunnigar and in two rounds you'd be coming up against 25 and 26 under!"

"We were pleasantly surprised after the first round." At that point, Cunnigar trailed hosts Lakeside by just two-thirds of a shot after Anthony Maher, Josie and Martin McCormack fired a 14 under par opener. Lakeside is a course the West Waterford set are familiar with. "We had been up in Lakeside a few times coming up to the PJ Bell and knew we could hit it. It's a pitching course," enthuses Michael of the famed Templemore layout, which has been host to so many championships and tournaments over the years.

"We'd gone up last year to play in the Mixed Foursomes." That was a reference to the Munster Mixed, in which two other Cunnigar pairings scooped the Best 18 prizes. "Paul and myself had been up there coming up to the PJ Bell. The three of us played three rounds on the Friday (eve of the P.J. Bell)." All that practice paid off as the second successive 42 secured victory by a shot and two-thirds.

Did trouble manifest itself anywhere on the glory march? "Not as such. There were a couple of weak shots. There was never any danger of taking

a four. The pars were always there.” There were no aces although there were some close shaves. “I left one four inches short on the 9th, recalls Michael. “On the 10th, Paul was literally a roll away from going in.” Michael claims, “I’m more a casual player. I’m more involved on the club side. I’m only playing for 18 months to 2 years. I went down one day for a game with a friend of mine and never left!”

Cunnigar teams have finished in the top three six times in the last seven stagings of the National Mixed Team Event. 2016 saw the club’s third win in the tournament, two under the new Scramble format and one under the old Stableford system. “Cunnigar has a good mix of Ladies, Gents and Juveniles coming up,” says Michael. Scrambles are felt to be an efficient way of introducing new members into a club. The diversity of grades among the membership clearly assist a push for National Mixed Team Event glory as does the proliferation of scrambles at club level in Cunnigar.

Michael is justifiably proud of the club he presides over. “It’s a good club once you’re willing to work on it. When Committee came up I went for it. There’s good communication be-

tween everybody.” Team mates Paul and Michelle are also on Committee. “Everyone seems happy with me, thank God,” is Michael’s synopsis of his Presidential term to date. “The weekly tournaments were Three-Ball Scrambles. They were the only thing we played in Cunnigar. I took over running the competitions. We now have a men’s singles on Tuesdays, a ladies’ singles on Wednesdays and only one scramble per week. It’s a change – a mixture now - and people are happy.”

In 2015, Paul O’Riordan became the third Cunnigar member to win the National Junior Strokeplay championship. Michael is clearly impressed. “Paul’s the limelight man – he’s a winner. He is a good driving force - he pushes on the pressure. He talks to himself on the tee box. He will talk himself into the shot. ‘Come on Paul!’ He really enjoys it.” A National Mixed Team medal was definitely a target this year. “In fairness, Paul has been talking about the PJ Bell since January. We played together as a team at the Short Grass Classic last year. We were pipped. Athgarvan caught us out.”

Michelle O'Connor and her relations are steeped in the lore of Cunnigar. "Michelle's family have been involved in the club since its formation. Her father Michael Delaney is one of the founding members. She doesn't play a lot but her putting is excellent," purrs Michael. Michael and Paul play a lot of Pitch and Putt. "We're into the car on a Wednesday morning. We've played 30 or 40 courses around Waterford and Cork and the surrounds. That brings on your game a lot." Casual player or not, Michael still has many ambitions in the sport. "I quali-

fied for the All Ireland (Strokeplay) last year and that's my goal again for this year." Pitch & Putt is booming in Dunganarvan. "I was down there earlier today," buzzes Michael proudly. "It's absolutely fantastic. We're preparing to play Bagenalstown in the Inter Club." (Postscript: Cunnigar went on to win that match). Cunnigar course didn't open until March in 2016 due to the inclement weather. Some of the members are clearly making up for lost time!



2016 National Gents Matchplay @ Seapoint. Martin O'Neill (St. Patrick's, Semi Finalist), Dayle Donohue (St. Patrick's, Runner Up), PPUi President Mervyn Cooney, Shane Murphy (Raffeen Creek, Winner) and Mark Millar (Cement, Semi Finalist). Shane wins his first National Gents Matchplay title.

# BACKSPIN PRODUCTION TEAM

Jason O'Connor, John Manning, Mark Keohane and Paul Hayes

(continued from first page) on TV on both Irish TV and Eir Sport (formerly Setanta) as part of a programme produced by Will Downing and the Irish Sports Network Group. The programme was a great success and the general presentation of not only the course but also the event itself reflected very well on the Union in general. Hopefully the TV cameras will be returning to our events again in the not too distant future. The focus is on Strokeplay for the coming weeks though with the National Strokeplay Championships in both the Ladies and Gents.

We focus on the Ladies in this edition while we will look at the Gents in Tullamore on the website next week. John Manning has a profile of St Stephens and there is a look ahead to the three grades on the day. I want to especially thank John

for his help with this edition with the tight time-scale created to produce same. We hope to have another edition around autumn time which hopefully will be a bit broader in terms of its content.

We hope that you enjoy reading this edition and as always welcome suggestions on how to improve future ones.

Yours in Sport,  
Jason O'Connor

---

Communications & Press Officer

PPUI

0868048933

[jason@ppui.ie](mailto:jason@ppui.ie)

## **MAJOR UPCOMING FIXTURES AND DATES TO REMEMBER**

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>July 23rd &amp; 24th</b> | <b>Ladies National Strokeplay Finals @ St. Stephen's</b>  |
| <b>July 30th to 31st</b>    | <b>Gents National Strokeplay Finals @ Tullamore</b>   |
| <b>July 13th to 14th</b>    | <b>Leinster Inter Counties @ St. Bridget's &amp; Tullamore<br/>Munster Inter Counties @ Tramore</b> |
| <b>August 6th</b>           | <b>Under 16 Leinster Strokeplay Finals @ The Acres</b>  |
| <b>August 7th</b>           | <b>Under 16 Leinster Inter County @ The Acres</b>   |
| <b>August 13th</b>          | <b>Under 16 Munster Strokeplay Finals @ Tramore</b>   |
| <b>August 14th</b>          | <b>Under 16 Munster Inter County @ Tramore</b>  |
| <b>August 20th</b>          | <b>Under 16 National Strokeplay Final @ Royal Meath</b>   |
| <b>August 21st</b>          | <b>Under 16 National Inter County @ Royal Meath</b>   |



Ahead of the Ladies National Strokeplay Finals, Jason O'Connor's preview is available on page 14 and John Manning's profile of St. Stephen's is available on page 2. Pictured above are the Intermediate and Junior prize winners from last years competition held at Ringcommons



2015 National Matchplay champion John Walsh tees off from the first hole @ Seapoint Pitch and Putt Club, Co. Louth in this years National Matchplay Finals. Shane Murphy (Raffeen Creek) would go on to claim his first title.