



**PITCH AND PUTT
IRELAND**

ALL-IRELAND MATCHPLAY FINALS PREVIEW 2026

**Q&A WITH
NATIONAL COORDINATOR
DARREN O'CONNELL
(TULLAMORE)**



PITCH AND PUTT IRELAND

01

Q:

Darren, this weekend's All-Ireland Matchplay Finals across Rocklodge, Bishopstown & Ranges in Cork will be your first national competition as National Coordinator since being elected at Convention. How are you feeling heading into the weekend?



A:

I am feeling confident that we can produce a professional and enjoyable championships for players, spectators and officers on duty across all three beautiful courses. A lot of work has gone on behind the scenes in preparation for this weekend between the girls in the office, myself and my fellow officers to make this National Championship the biggest one yet. I think the new set up for the live draws went down well with our members and hopefully the new live scoring system, that is being released this week, will bring a professional feel to the championships. I must thank Jason Cregan in advance, he has been brilliant and fantastic to work with on this!!



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02 **Q:**



Taking on a national role within Pitch & Putt Ireland is a major responsibility. What motivated you to put your name forward for the position?

A:

I think over the past few years our game has become stuck and needed new ideas. I attended last year's National Matchplay draw and just thought we have to do better than this. I've been heavily involved with Tullamore for so long and I've always tried to implement exciting new ideas that enabled us to move our club forward. I believe in my ability to bring this approach to the bigger stage and I am excited for the challenges that lie ahead.



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03

Q:



One of the notable changes this year has been the revised match schedule, with players now playing two games each day instead of the traditional 1,3,2 format. What was the thinking behind that decision?

A:

The National Matchplay is our biggest event and for us to showcase our best players playing at the highest level, this change needed to be made. I believe if players are fresher going into matches, then we are giving them every chance to play to their highest level. Three gruelling games on a hot day in June is just not good for the health of the players, I witnessed this at Tullamore in 2018 and at Erry last year and it wasn't a great sight. I know there will be purists out there who prefer the old way but I have received plenty of positive feedback about this since I made the change. Just like the regional qualifying, there is no harm trying this for at least one year. Additionally, it is economically beneficial for players, especially with the price of accommodation these days.



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04

Q:

The All-Ireland Matchplay Finals are always one of the standout weekends on the calendar. What makes this championship so special in your view?



A:

Matchplay is my favourite game, I just think there's nothing better than witnessing two players going head-to-head in a tense affair regardless of the quality of play. This event is pure drama and provides so many talked about matches. We are lucky to have so many incredible players in both the Ladies and the Gents game that give us these moments. I think to they have won it through outstanding play over as they have won it through outstanding play over eight to twelve rounds and not just two or three.



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05

Q:

Cork has a proud history within pitch and putt, with Rocklodge, Bishopstown & Ranges all highly respected venues. What are your thoughts on the host courses this weekend?



A:

I have been fortunate enough to play in every championship in Rocklodge over the past ten to fifteen years and each time I get blown away by how spectacular the course is. It is one of Ireland's finest courses and is always in unbelievable condition. The members are always so welcoming and know how to run a great championship. I visited Bishopstown and Ranges for the first time last week and genuinely couldn't believe I had never seen either of them before. The facilities at both are excellent and the people were so friendly. Bishopstown has the potential to be a regular host for national championships over the coming years, I definitely look forward to playing it someday. Ranges is so charming and has some cracking shots, especially the 18th!!! The course is so well maintained and I think the intermediate and junior ladies will really enjoy themselves over the weekend.



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07

Q:

There has been a strong level of competition across all grades this season. How encouraged are you by the standard currently within pitch and putt?



A:

We in Ireland are so spoilt to have some of the world's best players serving up magnificent championships throughout the year, that is why we look forward to weekends like this one so much. I also think it hides the fact that outside the senior Ladies and Gent's grades, the intermediate and junior grades have so many talented players that could shine in any other country. I am looking forward to watching matches at all three venue's this weekend. We are also very fortunate to have some great young players coming through like Jason Kelly, Jack McShane and Molly O'Toole that will progress to senior over the coming years and light up our championships.



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08

Q:



This role can often involve a lot of work behind the scenes that people may not see.

What have your first few months in the position been like?

A:

Hectic!! I have had more late nights working on NEC material over these past three months than I have had socialising over the last ten years. It's been a lot of work, I basically had to start from scratch and create new systems for logging entries, new timesheets, scoring systems etc. The girls in the office have been brilliant and have gone above and beyond to help implement these changes.

The big changes are noticed but it's the ones you don't see that take up the most time. As people are aware, I am not afraid to try new things and I think the recorded draws are a great example of this. We started with a basic set up for the provincial draws as a base and then expanded on that idea to make it bigger and more professional. This is what I intend on doing with all ideas that are implemented this year.



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09

Q:



Finally, what are you most looking forward to about your first All-Ireland finals weekend as National Coordinator?

A:

I am just looking forward to watching some great pitch and putt and meeting so many old and new friends. Our new systems are in place to ensure myself and my fellow officers are on the course and not just stuck in the clubhouse, so don't be afraid to come up and chat with us.

I want to thank my fellow officers for all their hard work and thank them in advance for this weekend.

I want to wish the committee's and members of Rocklodge, Bishopstown and Ranges the very best over the weekend, I'm sure we will have another memorable weekend.

Finally, to our competitors and spectators, I wish you all safe travels to Cork and the very best of luck to those competing.



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