

## No 3: David MacIndoe

Age: 40

**What's he do?** He's the very skilful course manager at Killarney Golf and Fishing Club in Eire.

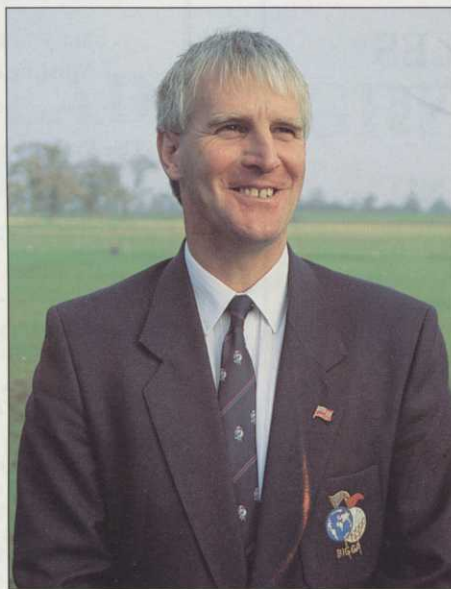
**Why do you say skilful?** Killarney is one of the world's top courses and David has been running the show for ten years. Killarney is also one of the wettest places in Europe – 80 inches of rain fell last winter from October to April – and David has just talked the club into spending about £460,000 on a new irrigation system.

**That takes some doing.** Yes, and it hasn't stopped raining since they started the work in October.

**Why do they need it then?** Insurance. As I've already said, Killarney is one of the top clubs in the world – it staged the Irish Open in 1991 and 1992 (with Nick Faldo winning on both occasions) and it is preparing to host the Curtis Cup, the ladies' equivalent of the Walker Cup, in 1996. The old system watered the greens; the new system will water the greens, tees and fairways of both courses. "It's an insurance in case we ever do have a drought," explained David. "There's a single pipe down the centre of the fairways. It's sensible to put it in when you're spending all the money on the greens and tees and you have to take a main through the course anyway." There are four pop-ups round each green and on a couple of the larger greens they're using fairway sprinklers. Plus there are two approach sprinklers. The Rainbird system with new Master 3 control system (the first in Europe) cost £405,000. Three storage tanks that can hold 47,500 gallons each, their bases and pump house take the total past £460,000.

**How did he get the club to agree to it?** David could sell sand to the Arabs, but he was also realistic. He knew he wouldn't get it the first time of asking, so he kept asking. "I've enough experience to know now that the first time you ask for something, especially a major expenditure, it will invariably be turned down out of hand. But if you keep coming back, do your homework right and present it properly, then eventually they have to listen to you." He first brought up the idea in '87. They said: "Can't we upgrade the present system?" He said: "Not really, we can improve it." So they said: "Improve it and we'll talk about it again." "So we spent a couple of thousand improving the system and two years later I went back to them and said 'You said come back to you in a year or so's time, here I am. We need this, we still need this.'" With heavy play and no rain, the tees were unmanageable. After three or four years of trying they eventually said go away and get some estimates. That's what he did two years ago. The committee sat on the estimates for two years before finally sanctioning the purchase.

**You mentioned heavy play, how heavy?** 130,000-150,000 rounds a year from the 1,700



members and 40,000 visitors a year.

**You also mentioned heavy rain, how heavy?** It's expected to be around 100 inches this year.

**That must make managing difficult.** "It's a constant battle to keep the courses cut and presented nicely," says David. Trying to organise topdressing and other maintenance practices is difficult. "The forecaster is my best friend. I never go a day without phoning him and getting a long-term forecast so I can plan when I might have a chance of doing a job."

**What other problems does he have?** Old deers.

**Lady members are often the worst...** No, d-e-e-r-s, as in Bambi.

**Ahhhhhhhh.** More *uggghhhh*, especially when they run full pelt across the greens. "They're not a big problem but they do cause us anxious moments especially at this time of year when they're mating – the stags do a lot of fighting for dominance. Thankfully they usually stay on the fairways. But occasionally they go on the greens. If they walk, it's not a problem – the small hoof marks are no worse than a pitch mark – but if they charge across the greens because they're being chased by a dog, then they can cause a lot of damage."

**What sort of greenkeeper is David?** He is a great believer in the traditional methods. "You can't overfeed and overwater through the summer and expect the course to take all the rain in the winter. The course has to get some chance to dry out," he told us. "And if it does dry out I let nature take its course and just use the watering system to keep it alive." His favourite machine is the Verti-drain. He uses it at least twice a year, but some greens are done four times. Without it he couldn't keep the course

playable. "If you can keep the top 3 or 4ins open, they will drain."

He also topdresses by hand. He's tried modern machines but when the course is wet and the ground is soft machines do more harm than good round the approaches and backs of greens.

**It's easy for him to order his lads out with shovels...** He goes out with them. His management style is very much hands-on. "I think in Ireland you have to, especially if you're a foreigner (he's Scottish). If I sat in my office all the time I don't think they'd have the same respect. You have to get out there and be alongside them. Not all the time but definitely some of the time. It's important to show them you can do the job every bit as good as they can."

**How many lads does he have?** He has a staff of 17 and says "they're a great bunch of lads."

**Are they helping him conquer *Poa annua*?**

They're putting up a brave fight, but it's not a battle he can win. "When I was younger I believed there was no reason why you couldn't have a pure bent strand of green or 80-90% bent. But in my situation where you have extremely heavy play in a wet climate the bents just can't survive. I still try to get as much bent in the greens as possible and occasionally overseed with bent but at the end of the day the greens aren't getting any better. There's only so much traffic a green will take and once you get over that limit the good grasses are eroded away." When he arrived at Killarney the greens were 90% *Poa*. But, with good management, including intensive aeration, and less play in the winter, he got the bents to dominate. After a couple of years of arriving they were up to 75-80% bent, but over the past few years they've gone back to about 50/50. However, he's not conceding defeat. "If you give up the battle you may as well give up the job."

**Is there anything the club can do to help?**

They've already taken the first steps – they've bought 80 acres of land for £1million and are negotiating for another 68 acres alongside it. The aim is to build a third course to satisfy the huge demand for golf in the area (Killarney has a waiting list of 400), but it will also enable David to rest a course during the winter.

**Does he play on his courses?** Yes, he's a four-handicap player and says it helps him "to relate to members' feelings about the course."

**How did he get interested in greenkeeping?** His next door neighbour was a greenkeeper.

**Not to be confused with:** Alec MacIndoe (his greenkeeping son at Stockley Park, Middlesex).

**Least likely to say:** "It's raining, I won't go out today."

**Most likely to say:** "Cheers!"