

JUNE 2010

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**COURSE FEATURE**

## A dream fulfilled

Jim McKenzie bought into the dream of a Welsh businessman in 1993. In October that dream becomes a reality. Scott MacCallum visited Celtic Manor to hear the story

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**Back in 1993, a wealthy businessman talked passionately to a talented young greenkeeper about his vision of building a golf course. It was a tough pitch, not because the idea of building a course over the land surrounding the house where the meeting was taking place, was so outrageous, but because of the sheer scale of what he was describing.**

The land, in a South Wales valley on the outskirts of Newport, was beautiful, but it had never entered an engaged eye of 'fore!' - not had it housed the swinding sound of a ball dropping four inches into a cup, but this man was talking about building European Tour venues over it. He was even talking about hosting Ryder Cup!

Some 17 years on I sat in a luxury clubhouse overlooking the magnificent golf course that in 141 days time would host the Ryder Cup, listening to that same young greenkeeper recount how he fell when he listened to Sir Terry Matthews, the owner of Celtic Manor Resort, explain his dreams for the future.

"When he started to talk about golf tournaments and Ryder Cups and I thought he was absolutely nuts," said Jim McKenzie, who was in the process of considering leaving The Westworth Club, where he worked under Chris Kennedy, and heading west.

"Within an hour, though, if he'd asked me to punch my way through the wall I'd have asked him which hand he wanted me to use. He was that much of an inspirational character."

It would be fair to suggest that even Terry Matthews, and his immovable world class events and, at the beginning of October this year, the pinnacle of it all - that Ryder Cup.

The Ryder Cup is the third largest sporting event in the world in terms of television viewers after the Olympics and the World Cup," said Jim, who is now the third longest serving employee of Celtic Manor.

"As Wales will never host an Olympics or a World Cup this is as big as it gets."

All the work that has been carried out at Celtic Manor has been done with a view to hosting the Cup. The first golf course built was the Roman Road which was followed

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