

Donagher revelling in Irish opportunity

It's been a long road from Zimbabwe to the director of golf role at Castleknock Golf Club in Dublin for 31-year-old Ryan Donagher.

Forced to flee Zimbabwe with his family during the early years of the Robert Mugabe regime, a chance meeting with Maurice Cassidy at Nuremore Golf Club set him on course to his current position.

"We were caught up in the middle of things in Zimbabwe and had to get out," the 31-year-old recalled.

"There was no plan to come to Ireland that's simply where my father got offered some work. I'll never forget it because we arrived on the same day the attacks happened on the World Trade Centre in New York.

"I was 16 at the time and it was pretty traumatic but I can only imagine what it must have been like for my parents who left everything behind and had to start all over again in their 50s. It was just one of those things, we had to get on with it and it all worked out in the end."

A promising junior who had ambitions to play tournament golf as a pro, Donagher was planning to go to college in America when his world was turned upside down.

"One of the stipulations to get into college in America was that you had to play for your country," he added.



Ryan Donagher

"I was selected to play for Zimbabwe but we were thrown out a month before I got my official cap. That was the end of my chances of getting to America."

Suddenly deposited in Ireland golf naturally took something of a back seat.

"I had to take a job at McDonald's to help the family out and to help us move forward," he added.

"The Laytown and Bettystown club were very good to me and took me under their wing, offered me membership, but I really didn't hit a ball seriously for three years.

"Then I got a job working at the Nuremore

Hotel in Monaghan and the professional there, Maurice Cassidy, got talking to me about the PGA route and the degree course. It offered me a chance to get back into the game and that got me going."

In 2009, Donagher started his training working as an assistant at Joe Frawley's retail outlet in Dundalk before moving on to Ardee Golf Club and completing his training under Scott Kirkpatrick.

After a spell working for Carr Golf Services as the operations manager at Silloge Park in Dublin, he was appointed as head professional at Kilcock Golf Club in Co Meath.

After a year, with the club struggling financially, he was made director of golf. It was a move that proved successful for both parties.

"It worked out very well and thankfully the club officers listened to me," said Donagher.

"We introduced a flexible membership which was relatively new at the time.

"It really took off and certainly increased the membership during a period when there was a lot of uncertainty at the club.

"It was a difficult couple of years but it was brilliant from an experience point of view to go through that and learn from it."

He moved to Castleknock at the start of April and found a thriving club which he describes as 'phenomenally busy'.

"It's a little different to a traditional members' club. The revenue drivers are green fees and corporate events but there's a nice balance," he added.

"We're working to get the academy up and running and we've introduced for the first time in a club's history a new junior membership that attracted 100 children.

"It has been hectic and much busier than I thought it would be but looking at my career going forward, this is the place I need to be, having responsibility for a team. It's a fantastic opportunity."

Fresh challenge for Gallagher

Clandeboyne Golf Club has appointed Michael Gallagher head PGA Professional.

The 31-year-old, from Cookstown, took up his post at the start of May following an 11 year spell as assistant to Gary Chambers at Killymoon Golf Club.

Gallagher has formerly been named the Great Britain and Ireland PGA Assistant and Junior Golf Coach of the year.

He created the hugely successful 'Irish Junior Open' that attracted more than 300 junior golfers to Killymoon in 2015. This year he has introduced four provincial events to form the new 'Applegreen LowFuelcard Irish Junior Open Series'.



Dotted line: Michael Gallagher with Victor McElfpatrick, Clandeboyne captain

"It has been busy but the move has gone very well. I felt very prepared for taking this step and that is all because of the experience I gained working with Gary at Killymoon," said Gallagher.

"I have been warmly received at Clandeboyne. They have a great facility here, with the two courses, the Ava and Dufferin catering for all abilities.

"My remit includes marketing and promoting the club but I really want to focus on developing the junior section. Clandeboyne has a reputation for producing some great young players and I really want to continue that tradition."

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