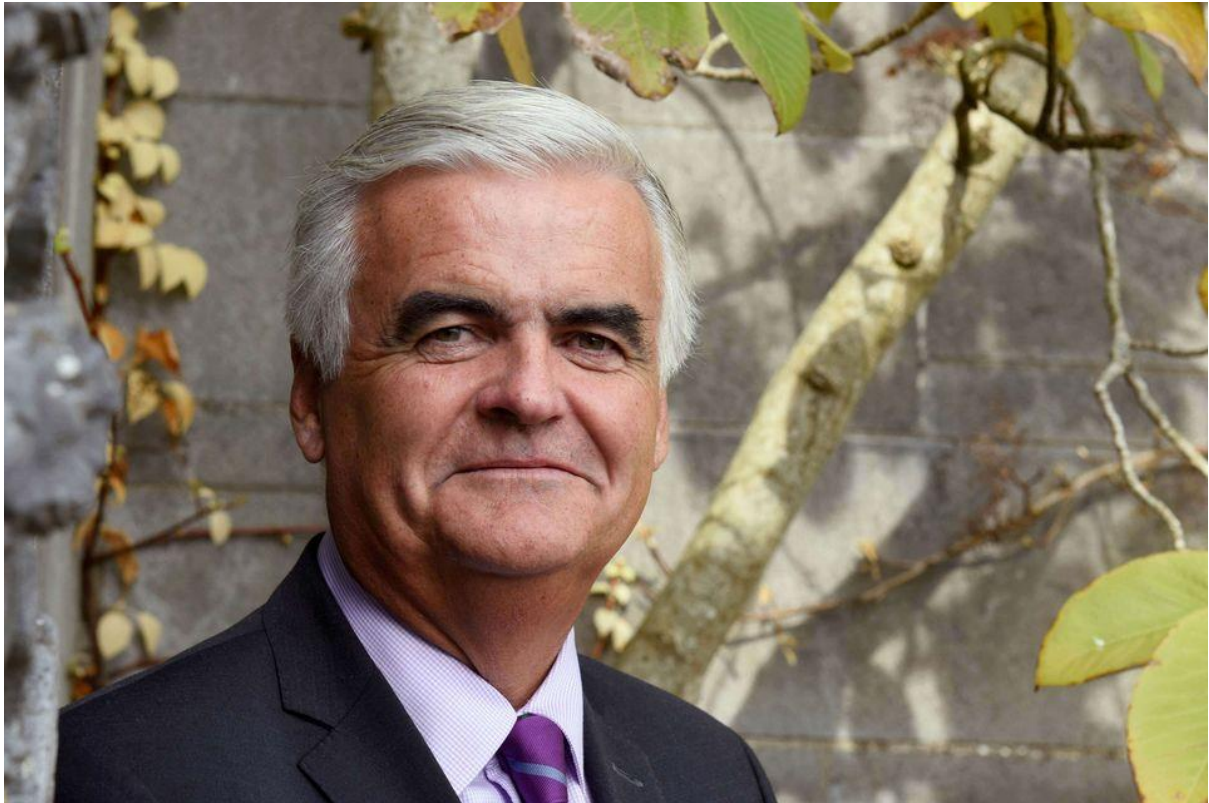


A Quick 18 with Mark Nolan: ‘We can turn our hand to anything if we all work together’

Dromoland Castle’s Managing Director Mark Nolan on his love of golf and his pride at hosting the KPMG Women’s Irish Open



Perfect happiness: A round of golf with good friends



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Brian Keogh

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Mark Nolan

Handicap: 21

Clubs: Dromoland, Lahinch & Portmarnock

Mark Nolan became general manager of Dromoland Castle at the tender age of 29, and though the locks are now a little greyer, he remains at the helm as Managing Director of one of Ireland's great hotels.

He's a busy man these days as not only is Dromoland busily preparing to host the second edition of the KPMG Women's Irish Open from 31 August to 3 September, but he's also got some pressing tee times for Open Week at Lahinch.

While he would never claim to be a great golfer, he loves trying to improve at Dromoland, Lahinch and Portmarnock, where his father introduced him to the game.

1. How's your golf? Well, I am going through the doldrums at the moment, but you only need one good round to pull you around. Unfortunately, I play a lot with my head as opposed to my hands.

2. How did you get started in the game? My dad was very keen but also as bad a golfer as I am. He played Portmarnock on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings, and I used to caddy for him in my formative years. Then I joined Milltown with school friends, where I got a genuine affection for the game.

3. Choose your weapon....Driver or putter? And why? If it doesn't have to be one or the other, I choose my seven-iron. In fact, I have two seven-irons in my bag. If I can get it going, I can break people's hearts.

4. Links or parkland? Why? My heart says parkland because I'm near Dromoland so much, but links golf is fabulous. That said, parkland courses have dramatically improved in this country in the past 15 years. Our green fee revenue has improved dramatically in the last two years thanks to our significant investment in the course.

5. When were you happiest on the golf course? The big thing in my golfing world these days is The Ashes. It's four guys going head to head for a week in Portugal, and we barely come back talking to each other; it can be so competitive. We play the same pairings every year, and I think we just played our 78th match last week. Winning is such fun.



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6. Who was your sporting hero as a kid? Peter Townsend was the pro in Portmarnock, and he married my cousin, and he was meant to host Tony Jacklin and Tommy Horton during the Irish Open one year. Unfortunately, the renovation of his house wasn't completed in time. So it was one of the greatest weeks of my father's and my life when they came to stay with us. They were heroes of mine forever after.

7. Name someone from the hospitality business you especially admire and why? One of the people who helped form me was Rory Murphy, who was the general manager at Ashford Castle. Many years ago, he took me on as a Junior Assistant at the demand of my mother, who was not a woman to mess around. I worked with him for six years, then moved down here at 29 years of age, and I've been here since. He was certainly a major influence on me, and we're still great friends to this day.

8. What's your golfing ambition? Do you have one? Unfortunately, the game gets into my head, and I beat myself up, which a 21-handicapper shouldn't do. So one of my ambitions is to lighten up and try not to think about it so much. If I do that, I hope I will improve.

9. Name your dream fourball (they don't have to be golfers). And name the venue. It would have to be at the Old Course at St Andrews, and I'd love to play with my son Marcus, Elon Musk, who rocks everybody's boat, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who I had the good fortune to meet eight or nine years ago.

After landing at Shannon, there was something wrong with his aircraft, and he had to wait for a part. So he came over and had lunch here, and he was such a nice guy. He hadn't any political aspirations at the time; he was a well-known comedian. How he's managed to do what he's done, showing such commitment to his people at a time when most others would have walked away and headed into exile, is just amazing.

10. What is the proudest moment of your career to date? As a golfer, it was winning the Dr Browne Cup with my partner Tom Sheils last year. But professionally, it's hosting the KPMG Women's Irish Open at Dromoland after it was in the wilderness for 12 years. I am just very proud of our Director of Golf, Eamonn O'Donnell and the entire team here. They are brilliant people with a can-do attitude. There is nothing that we can't turn our hand to if we all work together.

11. If I gave you a mulligan in your career, what would it be? I would possibly have spent more time with my kids when they were young. I was here 24/7, and sometimes you look back and say, was that necessary. But that being said, I have a wonderful relationship with them. We are a very close family.

12. If you had just one more round to play, where would it be? Don't say Augusta National unless you absolutely must. Well, I've played Augusta, so I would have to say here at Dromoland.

13. What's your favourite par three? The 11th at Lahinch. It's either all duck or no dinner. For me, it's either a birdie or a triple bogey.

14. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? Doesn't have to be about golf. It would be to cut myself a little slack and not be so hard on myself. Life is not always about trying to be perfect.

15. What's your most treasured possession (memento maybe or could be your dog, car? First thing you'd save if there was a fire (after family of course). We lived on Eglinton Road in Dublin, and my father had a wonderful golfing memento in marble after he had a hole-in-one on the 15th. We were away in Mayo, and when we came home, the house was burgled, and everything of value had been stolen, including this memento. About five years ago, I got a phone call from a guy to say he was weeding a garden on Ailesbury Road and had found a marble plaque to a

Martin Nolan for a hole-in-one. So that would certainly be something very special to me that I would try to rescue.

16. If you could change something about your golf, what would it be? I'd swing slower.

17. Who is your favourite golfer of all time? Seve Ballesteros. Long before Tiger Woods or Rory McIlroy, he was the swashbuckling player who put golf back on the map for me.

18. What's your idea of perfect happiness? A gin and tonic in the clubhouse at Lahinch after a good round of golf with some good friends of which I am blessed to have many.