

Andalucía Costa del Golf



Spanish golf in better health

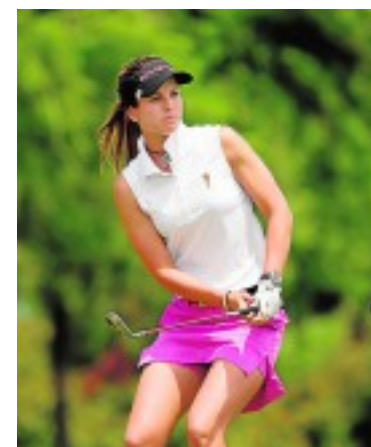
There are now 271,000 federated golfers in the country; 16% of them are in Andalucía [P2&3]



INTERVIEW

"The 1997 Ryder Cup was a turning point"

Javier Reviriego, CEO of Valderrama, has become the first European at the Club Leaders Forum [P7]



EUROPEAN TOUR

Noemí Jiménez, Malaga golf's next big thing

The 24-year-old is out for her first Tour win and wants to follow in her idol's footsteps [P6]

Golf fills in gaps for the holiday industry

The sport is at the helm of the Costa's efforts to promote year-round tourism and boost figures in autumn and winter [P4&5]

Sector showing signs of recovery with federated golfers on the up in Malaga

The sector, which is on the increase in Malaga, saw the lowest drop in numbers in eight years, although it is still far from the over 338,000 licences issued in 2010

Spanish golf is starting the year with a total of 271,170 federated players. Of these, 169,578 are amateurs and the other 1,592 professionals, according to figures just published by the Spanish Royal Golf Federation (RFEG).

The figure is 914 lower than a year ago, which represents a reduction of 0.3 per cent. It was, however, the smallest drop since 2011, and was the fifth consecutive year

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

in which the percentage has been smaller than in previous years.

The difference in numbers has been gradually decreasing, from a drop of six per cent in 2013 to 0.5 per cent in 2017. In 1990 there were

just 45,000 golfers in Spain, but the number went through the 100,000 barrier in 1996 and by early 2002 the total had risen to 200,000. There was a peak in 2010, with 338,588 federated players, and it was from then onwards that the decrease began.

It is interesting to see how many women now hold licences because there are more than 77,000, although they are only 28.6 per cent of the total. Of these women players, 42,690

are over the age of 50, 22,672 are between 21 and 50 and 11,823 are under 21. Of the younger female players, 8,476 are under the age of 16.

In Spain as a whole around 23,760 federated players are under 16, and 34,313 are under-21s. These account for 8.8 and 12.6 per cent of the total, respectively. This sector is continuing to grow, because at the start of 2015 there were 21,530 fewer youngsters under the age of 16 (and 33,682 fewer under-21s) than there are now, which in percentage terms is an increase of 7.6 and 11.9 per cent, respectively.

In 2015 the number of licences issued had dropped in every region of Spain, but now three can boast positive figures at the end of 2018 and one, Andalucía, is officially in a situation of 'technical balance'. The latest numbers are better than those for 2017, when four regions saw an increase in their numbers.

In absolute terms, 30 per cent of all licences are held in Madrid, where there are 82,530 federated players, followed by Andalucía with 43,800 and Catalonia with 28,696, representing 16 and 10.6 per cent of the total, respectively. The regions of Valencia (19,295), the Basque Country (17,328), Castilla y León (13,225) and Galicia (10,490) all have more than 10,000 federated players. In addition the number of licences held has increased in 20 provinces, continuing a trend which began three years ago when six, 11 and then 16 provinces registered small increases. Looking at amateur and professional licences together, the greatest increases have been in Madrid, Malaga, Zaragoza, the Balearics and Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Competition

On a competitive level, Spanish



Golf attracts more than half a million tourists to Andalucía every year. :: SALVADOR SALAS



Andalucía has more than a hundred golf courses. :: SUR

golf ended 2018 by prolonging the successes of the previous season, which had been a historic one in terms of trophies won. In addition to the victories of Jon Rahm and Sergio García, Rafael Cabrera-Bello ended the season high up in the classification, and other Spanish players won titles on different tours.

Spain ended the season third in terms of players in the Top 20, after the USA and Britain. Until now, the maximum had been two and that was only in 1991, when Seve was number one and Olazabal fourth. Both ended in the Top 10. Only Seve became world number one, in 1988.

There can be no better time to remember the legendary pair formed by Ballesteros and Olazabal, now recalled by a plethora Sergio García, still reflecting in the glory of being the first Spanish golfer to win a 'major' since 1999 (he achieved it at Augusta in 2017, after it had eluded him for so long), and by Jon Rahm, with his sensational debut on the European and PGA Tour.

It may seem strange that with so many successful Spanish players, the numbers of federated players are still comparatively low, but then golf is not a simple sport. Its technical complexity means that it takes time to learn the basic rules

and how to use the clubs. It can take up to five hours to play 18 holes, although these days there are plenty of 'pitch and putt' courses, which are smaller in size in order to make a round shorter and more attractive.

The prejudices which have surrounded golf for decades have not helped, either. It still has a reputation as a sport for the rich, even though it only costs about 70 euros to join and on a public course you can play nine holes for 15 euros. The number of golf licences may have fallen, but only football and basketball can claim to have more. Golf has more federated members than tennis, swimming, judo, handball, cycling and climbing.

Andalucía is home to 21 per cent of the golf courses in Spain, ahead of Madrid, Catalonia and Valencia. The Centro de Tecnificación has the highest number of federated players (6,548), followed by Club de Campo Villa de Madrid (6,329) and the Olivar de la Hinojosa Golf Club (5,535). National and regional federations have been organising campaigns to encourage more people to take up this sport, as a way of healing the wounds caused by the economic crisis and the increase in IVA, one of the most important matters still pending between the government and the sector.



The programme aims to fast-forward the careers of young professional players. :: SUR

A leg up for the next generation

The Spanish Federation has set up a programme to assist players during their early years as professional golfers

:: ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

MALAGA. Twenty-one professional golfers (ten women and 11 men), some of whom have already achieved very good results on different tours despite their youth, are taking part in the Pro Spain Team programme this year. This is an initiative by the Spanish Royal Golf Federation (RFEG) in collaboration with the Regional Federations, under which young elite golfers receive financial assistance and training when they are starting out as professional players.

The men selected by the RFEG Professionals Committee to take part in this programme in 2019 are Pep Anglés, Scott Fernández, Emilio Cuartero, Daniel Berná, Iván Cantero, Mario Galiano, Javier Sainz – all of whom were already involved in the Pro Spain Team programme in 2018 – and new members David Borda, Santiago Tarrío, Ángel Hidalgo and Manuel Elvira.

The women players taking part this year are María Parra, Nuria

Iturrios, Marta Sanz, Patricia Sanz, Noemí Jiménez, Luna Sobrón, Elia Folch, Silvia Bañón, Harang Lee and Fátima Fernández, all of whom were also involved in 2018. This year, Natalia Escuriola and Camilla Hedberg are not taking part.

All these young golfers have shown outstanding promise so far, and this year they will benefit from assistance to handle the change from amateur to professional status. It will also make it possible for them to join the professional tours more quickly. It is worth mentioning that one woman player, Luna Sobrón, already has a conditional card for the LPGA; she will be combining her presence on the LET – with five other women players – with the Symetra Tour where six others will also be aiming to improve their standard this year.

Among the men, two have a European Tour card (Iván Cantero and David Borda), four for the Challenge Tour (Scott Fernández, Pep Anglés, Emilio Cuartero and

Santiago Tarrío), one for the Latin American PGA (Mario Galiano) and four for the Alps Tour.

Everyone on this programme receives financial assistance, depending on the tour in which they normally compete, as well as training and help with administration and management. They can also use the Centre of Golf Excellence in the practice area at the National Centre, a state-of-the-art facility which places this centre at the forefront of world golf.

Commitments

In return for the technical and financial assistance they receive, the players selected for the Pro Team Spain programme are committed, among other things, to spending several days at RFEG initiatives such as Pro-ams, meetings with amateur teams etc, as well as taking part in the Spanish Open or Spanish Professional Championships in the future when their other obligations allow them to do so.



An amateur tournament. :: SUR



Golf is one of the most important economic sectors in Malaga. :: SUR

Preparations for peak season under way across the Costa's courses

The area has some of the best facilities in Europe in an ever-growing sector which is helping to combat seasonal tourism

ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

The Costa del Sol, unsurprisingly, gets its name from the number of hours of sunshine it enjoys all through the year. But when the traditional beach season is finally over, business owners and institutions do not just sit back and relax. It is time to take stock of how successful the summer has been and start wondering what the 'low season' will be like. However, this is becoming shorter every year thanks

to efforts to attract year-round tourism and the fact that more and more people are attracted by the idea of travelling outside the summer months.

This is certainly beneficial for the golf sector, which paradoxically starts its 'high season' in the autumn. The Costa del Sol has some of the best golf facilities in Europe and a major advantage over other destinations: its climate.

Winter is hard in many European countries and the low temperatures there tempt many golf enthusiasts to look for alternatives elsewhere. That is where the Costa del Sol comes into its own as a preferred option, reaching a higher position each year among the tour-

Visitors who come to play golf spend on average twice as much as other types of tourists

ism markets of Europe.

Statistics relating to golf from a tourism and sporting point of view show that on average visitors who come to this area to play golf spend almost twice as much as other tourists - and they stay for two days longer.

If on top of that we add the ability of this sector to attract a constant flow of visitors all year round,

it is not surprising that the authorities and private businesses have spared no effort in highlighting the fact that golf is an important weapon in the fight against the problem of seasonal tourism in Malaga.

Malaga province has everything to make it a world benchmark for golf tourism: climate, hotels, leisure facilities, culture, fantastic sports facilities and famous tournaments such as the women's Open de España, which took place just a few months ago at La Quinta Golf in Benahavís.

These events act as a showcase for the Costa del Sol at a key moment of the year: the quieter months before the normal peak

tourist season begins.

There can be no doubts about golf's importance to the local economy: tourism in general accounts for 13 per cent of the GDP of Andalucía, and the 500,000 golf tourists who visit the region each year represent about five per cent, according to statistics from the Junta de Andalucía.

Golf also generates employment and wealth on the Costa del Sol, but that is not all. It adds value to an area. According to the Diputación, the Malaga provincial government, golf has a major financial impact on the province: a direct and indirect production of 1.41 billion euros, thanks to golfers who stay for an average of 12.3 days and spend around 1,800 euros.

The golf sector in Malaga province has produced some positive forecasts for its high season and is aiming to become known as the perfect destination for visitors from other parts of Europe.

The Costa del Sol Tourism Board points out that the province has an "important international focus" and it is being promoted to golf fans elsewhere in Europe as somewhere they can play their favourite sport "in a privileged enclave with mild temperatures, very different to the harsh winters in the centre and north of the continent".

With that in mind, golf clubs and courses on the Costa del Golf are encouraging long stays which have been designed specifically for this specialised form of tourism. Now, more than ever, is the time for Malaga to boast about its privileged climate. Golf plays a key role in managing seasonal tourism by appealing to golfers in central and northern Europe, countries which are already important source markets for the destination, as corroborated by the latest tourism figures.

A look at the special offers and promotions for the high season for golf in Malaga province shows that the idea is not only to attract foreign tourists, but also visitors from elsewhere in Spain, who also play a significant role.

There is also a campaign to promote golf among local residents. Malaga has an enviable local community of golf fans, as can be seen from the continued success of the different amateur tournaments which are organised by clubs on both sides of the Costa del Sol, east and west of Malaga, throughout the year.

It would be unfair not to mention clubs in more rural parts of the province as well, such as Antequera Golf, as these also complement an offer which is unique in Europe and contribute to make the



Winter is the high season for golf on the Costa del Sol, thanks to its mild Mediterranean climate. :: EFE



The beaches can often be enjoyed in winter. :: SUR

province a unique destination for golf for visitors from anywhere in the world, and at any time of year.

The introduction of new professional and amateur tournaments in recent years has been key to consolidating golf as one of the most important tourism sectors on the Costa del Sol, which can boast more than 70 courses, almost 70 per cent of all those in Andalucía.

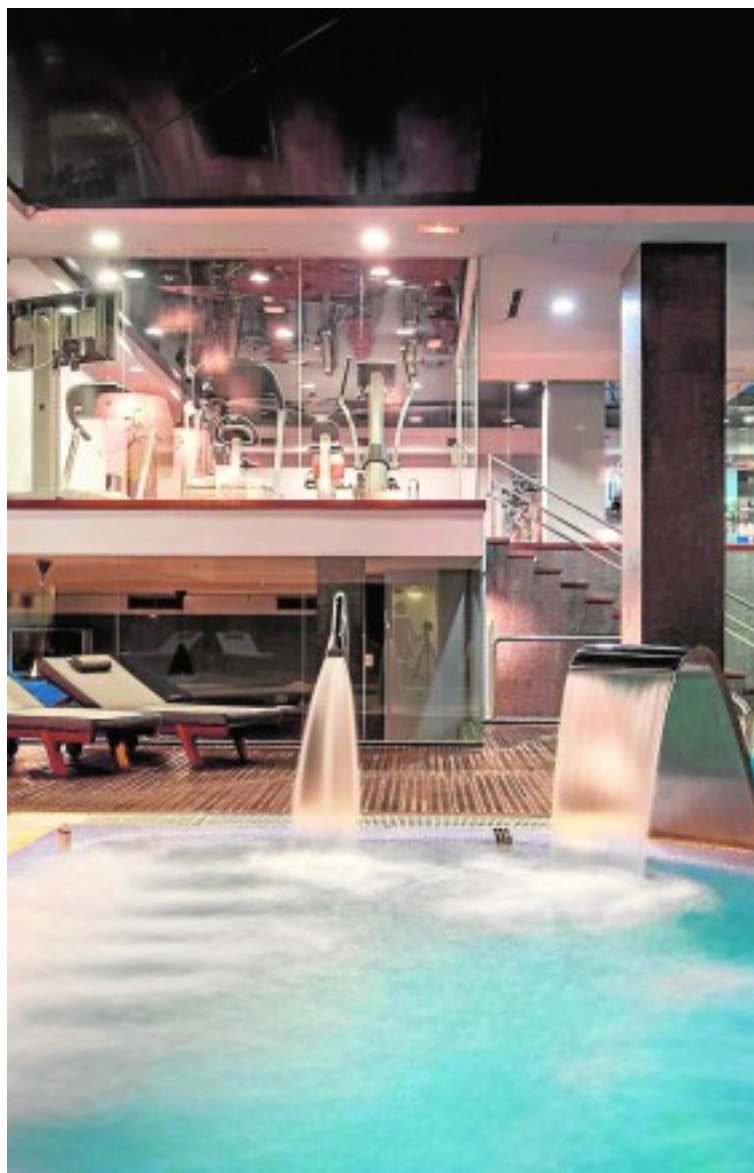
In the summer season, the golfing facilities attract quality tourists and help to promote golf among enthusiasts who already live in the province.

For that reason different initiatives are being developed so that, for example, even children can enjoy playing golf with the rest of

their family at discounted prices.

The Costa del Sol also has some of the most exclusive accommodation, places in which to enjoy a unique stay with plenty of golf involved. Marbella has the highest concentration of golf courses in the province, and is home to some of the most luxurious hotels and resorts, for example Villa Padierna, where everything is possible: spas, swimming pools, private apartments, hotel and, of course, several top-quality golf courses.

The Costa del Sol is the perfect destination for travellers who are looking for a Mediterranean destination with a mild winter climate, where golf plays a leading role but is not the only attraction.



The hotels offer all facilities. :: SUR

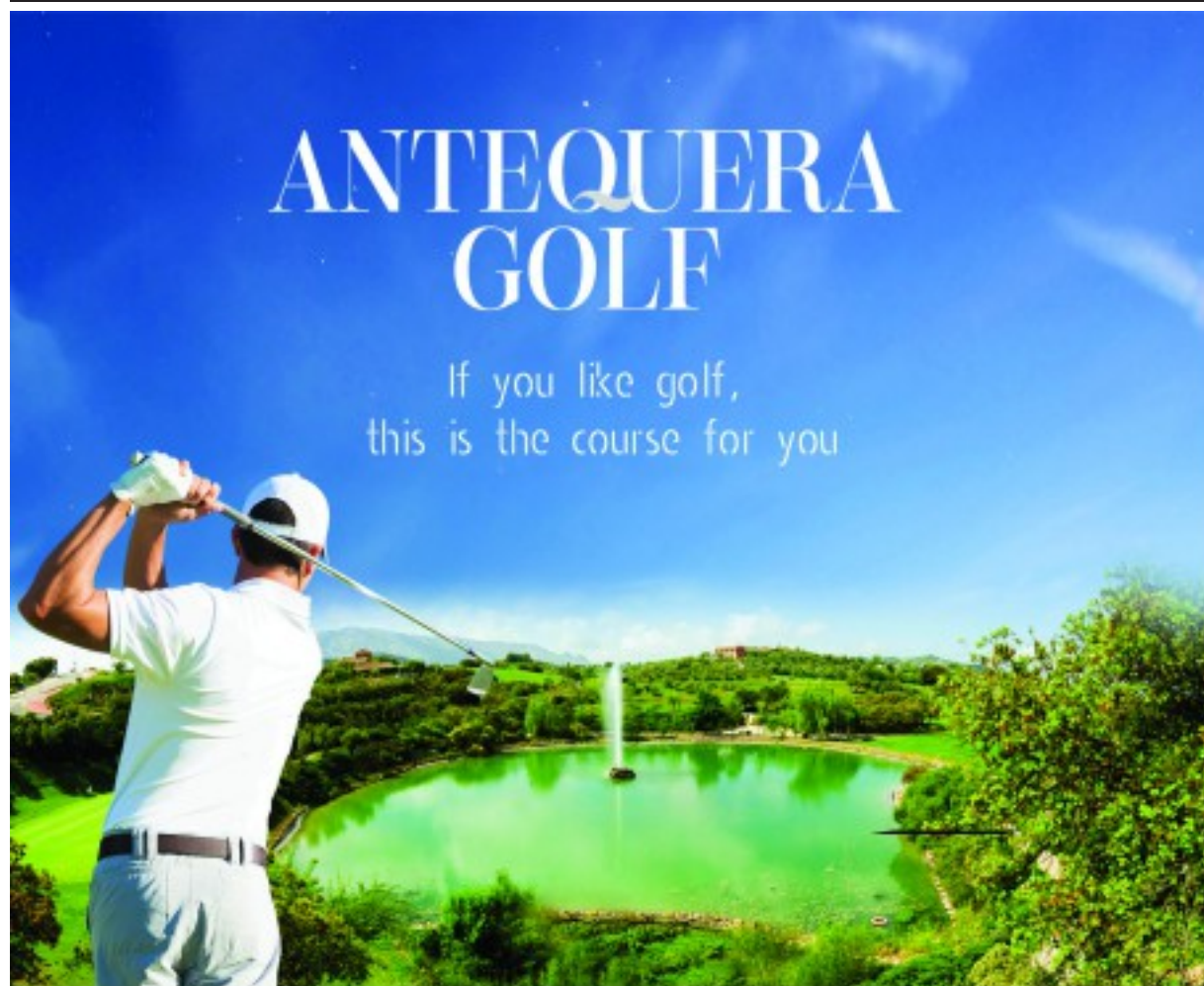
A HIGHLY-VALUED DESTINATION

The Costa del Sol is highly valued as a tourist destination, with visitors last summer giving it an average score of 8.37 out of ten. This data has been collated from a survey carried out by the Costa del Sol Tourist Board on hotel prices and client satisfaction in eight rival destinations.

The survey asked which aspects of the Costa del Sol were most highly valued by tourists and Elías Bendodo, the outgoing president of the Tourist Board, says the high scores for the destination reflect "the excellent levels of quality and the competitiveness of the Costa del Sol in all aspects, but especially in terms of hotels".

The Costa del Sol received higher scores than other destinations for staff (8.76), cleanliness (8.72), comfort (8.25), services (8.13) and quality-price Ratio (8.10). For location, it received 8.59.

For the study, the tourism authorities analysed the Costa del Sol, Costa de la Luz, Costa de Almería, Costa Blanca, Costa Brava, Canary Islands and Balearics, and the international destinations of the Algarve (Portugal) and Antalya (Turkey).



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heart of Andalusia



Following in a hero's footsteps

Noemí Jiménez has her sights on establishing herself on the European Tour and matching the achievements of her "hero" Azahara Muñoz

:: MARINA RIVAS

MALAGA. Before playing, she likes to listen to music but with just a few minutes to go she decides to focus with a motivational audio recorded by her 'mental coach', as she calls her. Her father is a firefighter and golf monitor and her mother, who is currently a housewife, is a karate black belt and was a PE teacher for children with Down Syndrome. She left home when she was 16 thanks to a high-performance grant which enabled her to train at the Joaquín Blume residence in Madrid, and after finishing her studies in Business and Tourism in the USA, Noemí Jiménez came home to Marbella. Not for good, though, just for a while as she waits for the Ladies European Tour, the top circuit on the continent.

Noemí is 25 and has only been a professional golfer for three and a half years - although when she picked up her first club as a child it was taller than she was - and she has an impeccable career behind her as an amateur, on an individual level and also in teams.

"It was hard to take the step to become professional, the level went up and it took a lot of work for me to meet the standard, but it was what

AN IMPRESSIVE RECORD AND NOW OFF TO EUROPE

Despite her youth, Noemí Jiménez's results so far are promising for golf in Malaga and Spain in general. As an amateur she was third in the world ranking and won a gold team medal in the European Championships and silver as an individual. Now professional, she has won the Let Access European tournament, qualified for the Spanish tour in Santander and was second in the Let Access European Tour ranking last season. This young woman's golfing career is well worth keeping an eye on.

I had to do. The difference is that when you are professional, golf becomes your work. You play for money, you have to pay your expenses... a lot of people give up," she says, also explaining that if it were not for her sponsors she wouldn't be

able to compete as much.

"For people who come from a normal family, like mine, it would be impossible to go to all the tournaments without a sponsor, among other reasons because on the women's tour you earn much less than the men do," she says. Noemí is also an ambassador for the Debra association, which helps families of children with butterfly skin, a rare illness.

She is well-known for her swing, which she was taught by her father, who still coaches her now, and she perfects her movements with golfer Michael Campbell, sports director of an academy near Marbella.

"I started to work with him in the middle of last year because he is a star and I knew he would teach me a great deal," she says. However, her real role model is only six years older than she is, and some people are already comparing the two.

"Azahara Muñoz is my hero. I contacted her when I was going to the States with a grant to train at the university she also went to, Arizona State. It's really expensive to study there. I couldn't have done it without the grant," she says.

Curiously, she is not the only one



Jiménez is hoping for her first win on the European Tour. :: SUR

in the family to be following in Muñoz's footsteps. "My younger sister, Lucía, is in America now with another golf scholarship, but she is enjoying studying Medicine and Psychology most and says that's what she will work in afterwards, not sport," she says.

She admires the way Muñoz got started; she is now the best golfer the province has seen, and they have met sometimes on the European Tour, although Azahara focuses more on the American tour.

"For the moment I'm going to work on making a name for myself in Europe and trying to win a few

things, but in a few years I'd like to compete in America," she says. She likes to dream big: "In the future I dream of going to the Olympics, like Azahara and Carlota Ciganda. Tokyo 2020 is too soon, but it would be incredible to be at the Paris Games in 2024."

Nevertheless, Noemí likes to be realistic and think about the present, knowing that after a few days at home she will have to pack her bags and head off to events and competitions all over the world, always dreaming of matching her idol and enjoying the excitement about what the future holds.

THE MONTH IN PICTURES



▲ **Positive start.** Jon Rahm made it eleven top-ten finishes in a row as he came fifth at the recent Farmers Insurance Open (pictured) and then tenth at the Phoenix Open at the start of the month, capping off a positive start to the season. :: SUR



◀ **Fespo.** The Andalusian and Cadiz provincial authorities joined forces to promote the area as a destination for sports tourism, especially golf, at the recent Fespo travel fair which took place in the Swiss city of Zurich. :: SUR

► "Serious misconduct".

Sergio García could face further punishment after being disqualified from the inaugural Saudi International for "serious misconduct" after admitting to damaging greens. :: SUR



▲ **Tenth year.** Azahara Muñoz kicked off her tenth year as a professional with a fifth-place finish at the Vic Open last week. :: SUR

"The 1997 Ryder Cup was a watershed moment for us"

Javier Reviriego **Director of Real Club Valderrama.** He has become the first European to join the Club Leaders Forum Advisory Board



Reviriego, with the prestigious Platinum Club award. :: SUR

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

Javier Reviriego, CEO of the Real Club Valderrama de Sotogrande (San Roque) has become the first European to join the Club Leaders Forum Advisory Board, comprised of 16 CEOs who have reached platinum status in their careers and manage some of the most prestigious private clubs on the planet.

Reviriego used to be a professional player and was director of Finca Cortesin and Fuerteventura Golf Resort, before moving to the most prestigious club in Europe nearly a decade ago.

–What does it mean to you, being the first European on the Club Leaders Forum Advisory Board?

–It is a matter of great pride for me, and proof that we are progressing a great deal in Europe. The important positions in our sector have traditionally been held by Americans and

British.

–When did you find out?

–The president of the Board rang me over Christmas and suggested that I join. I didn't hesitate for a moment. In fact, it had always been an objective in my career.

–How do you see the condition of Spanish courses in general?

–I think along general lines we have progressed a great deal. The sector has become more professional in recent years and we have very talented managers and greenkeepers. We can compete with some of the best courses in the world, and that would have been unthinkable some years ago.

–What are the sector's principal strengths and weaknesses?

–The strengths have a lot to do with the beauty of the areas around the courses, and the quality designs. Some of the world's best designers have left their mark in Spain, such as Robert Trent Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Kyle Philips and Gary Player. If you have good infrastructure and then you add correct maintenance, a lovely climate and excellent customer service, you have the perfect combination for attracting golfers from all over the world. In terms

of weaknesses, I would say the decrease in the number of players in Spain in recent years and the difficulties the administrations often place in our path. There are essential matters, like management of water and the use of phytosanitary products, in which we are years ahead of other sectors, but despite that we still face more obstacles.

–What makes Valderrama one of the most prestigious clubs in the world?

–I believe it is a combination of factors. If we are talking of the 'hardware', I would say the beauty of the cork oak forest around the course, the Trent Jones design, the quality maintenance and the facilities in general. In terms of what I call 'software', we have a top level team at the club and that enables us to offer an excellent

service. Our clients expect something more than a great course: they want to feel looked after and enjoy a unique experience.

–I imagine the club's history also has a lot to do with it.

–Without a doubt. The history of the club carries a lot of weight for our image and reputation. The Ryder Cup was a watershed moment, and projected the image of a course in perfect condition all around the world. Until then, nothing like that had ever been seen in Europe. People thought only America had courses like that.

–What are the selection criteria for Platinum clubs?

–The six basic criteria are: universal recognition and reputation, excellent facilities, level of service and experience, quality of membership, professional management at all levels and

the ability to adapt to new times. The ranking began to be drawn up 20 years ago and is highly respected in the USA. My principal work as a Board member will be to boost the brand in Europe and help more European clubs fulfil the standards of excellence which will take them into the top 100 in the world.

–How do you view the support from the administrations for professional tournaments in Andalucía, after years with no public sponsors?

–I believe there is no better way to project the image of a destination than through a major professional tournament. Other golf destinations, like Turkey, Morocco or Dubai, which compete with Andalucía, are committed to this type of tournament and are undoubtedly reaping benefits from it. I welcome the Junta's decision to support golf as a way of promoting tourism.

–What are the most important skills a course director needs?

–A club never stops being a business, so they need management knowledge, but a director also has to take decisions relating to marketing, merchandising, agronomy, event organisation and managing food and drinks. I would also say the way they deal with members and public relations is an essential part of it. In many cases we have to act like 'psychologists' when dealing with clients.

–How important a role does golf play in Andalusian tourism, and what would you ask of the new regional government?

–Golf tourism has a huge impact on the local economy, and I include residential tourism in that, not just visitors on vacation. I would ask the new regional government to continue to support golf as a means of promotion. It is a very profitable investment and has proven to be extremely effective.

2019 AGENDA

11 May
Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Concordia
Open tournament

8 June
Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Niños Mariposa
Open tournament

17 June
Lauro

Interautonómico Absoluto Femenino 2019
Open tournament

24 June

Antequera Golf
Campeonato de Europa Universitario 2019

Open tournament

13 July
Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Horizonte
Open tournament

20 July
Aloha

Torneo infantil
Open tournament

3 August
Aloha

Valle del Golf Aloha - Brisas
Open tournament

10 August
Aloha

Memorial Ibarrondo

Open tournament

13 August
Aloha

Torneo Junior
Open tournament

17 August
Aloha

Torneo padre e hijos
Open tournament

22 August
Bil Bil Golf

Campeonato de España Sub 16 y Benjamín de Pitch & Putt 2019
Open tournament

29 August
Lauro

Campeonato de España Interclubes Infantil 2019
Open tournament

28 September

Torrequera golf
Campeonato de España Dobles Senior Femenino 2019
Open tournament

5 October
Aloha

Trofeo Benéfico ASPANDEM
Open tournament

5 October
Aloha

'Pitch and Putt' Nacional
Open tournament

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