

Different Strokes

Philip Reid



Meadow can make a push for Solheim Cup place

You can't help but think that, perhaps, the Solheim Cup came to our shores a little bit too early. For all of the excitement of its staging in 2011 at Killeen Castle – superbly run at a great venue with the drama-filled finale inspired by Suzann Pettersen that saw Europe triumph against the odds – the absence of any home player on that team cruelly exposed the dearth of Irish women tour players.

In the three years since that match, things have started to change. Indeed, it is entirely feasible that Stephanie Meadow could make the European team for next year's Solheim Cup which will be played at St Leon-Rot Golf Club in Germany. If she does, Meadow would become the first Irish player to compete in an event which, for all intents and purposes, is the women's version of the Ryder Cup.

Meadow may have missed out on a full LPGA Tour card after a marathon play-off for the final spot in last week's Q-school in Florida but her conditional status (Category 17) will get her into more than a dozen tournaments on the 2015 LPGA Tour and she also intends to play in selected events on the Ladies European Tour. She will have enough starts to make an impact.

What seems apparent from Meadow's early life as a professional is that she has game. She looks the real deal, capable of mixing it with the best. As of now, having given a 10-months head-start to many more experienced players in the qualifying process, the 22-year-old Ulsterwoman is 18th in Europe's team standings for the

Solheim Cup (from which four players will be selected for Carin Koch's team). The more LPGA and LET events she plays next season, the further up that listing she will rise.

And, even now, Meadow must be on Koch's radar as a possible wild card pick. The captain has four of those to ponder. The Swede assumed the captaincy role in April of last year when Meadow was still playing collegiate golf in the states with the University of Alabama. Meadow's third-place finish in the US Women's Open at Pinehurst in June (on her pro debut) will have alerted Koch to a new kid on the block. Now, it is up to Meadow to stay in Koch's sightline.

Meadow has the makings of being the long-awaited role model for Irish women's golf on the professional circuit; and the successful starts that the Maguire twins, Leona and Lisa, have made to their own collegiate life in the USA, where they are attending Duke University, would suggest a wise move on their part to take that route (both academically and golfing).

The Solheim Cup is a great event. Given Ireland's rich playing contribution to various teams down the years – the Ryder Cup, the Walker Cup and the Curtis Cup – the absence of an Irish player on a Solheim Cup team is the one missing link. It seems only a matter of time before Meadow breaks that duck. But it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it could happen sooner rather than later – like at St Leon-Rot next September.



■ Stephanie Meadow: her conditional status (Category 17) will get her into more than a dozen tournaments on the 2015 LPGA Tour. PHOTOGRAPH: HUNGER MARTIN/GETTY

Lowry's 2015 plans

If he has his way, Shane Lowry will bypass an early-season trip to the Middle East in favour of kick-starting his 2015 on the PGA Tour in the United States where the Offalyman is ultimately intent on earning his tour card.

Of course, Lowry – now ranked 45th in the world – will require sponsor's invites for that to fall into place. He has targeted a start at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines followed by an appearance in the AT&T Pebble Beach pro-am at the start of February as his preferred option.

In mapping out his schedule up to May, Lowry's status as a top-50 player brings some benefits. As it is, Lowry is assured of appearances in The Masters (where he will make his debut) and also in the WGCs – the Cadillac at Doral and the Matchplay at Harding Park – while he will also get into the Players at Sawgrass as well as Bay Hill in the run-up to Augusta and the RBC Heritage at Hilton Head the week after it. With so many guarantees, Lowry is really only looking for three or four invites.

Dubai for Clarke

Darren Clarke has spent much of the past year juggling two tour cards – on the PGA Tour in the states and his home European Tour – but his appetite for some end of year criss-crossing of time zones continues this week with his participation in the inaugural Dubai Open.

Clarke has played the Beko Classic in Turkey, the Thailand Championship and now the Dubai Open – which is part of the Asian Tour – in maintaining the sort of schedule that many a younger man would run a million miles from at this juncture of the season.

The 46-year-old Ulster man is, however, showing some sense in mapping out such a schedule to finish off his year's work: he intends to spend Christmas with his family in the emirate.

Before that festive down time in the desert, Clarke will hope to contend in the tournament on the Els course where his former Ryder Cup team-mate David Howell, nowadays based in Dubai, is also in the field.

Quote of the week

“I'm worn out” – Greg Chalmers after defeating Adam Scott on the seventh play-off hole to win the Australian PGA championship.

Twitter talk: Poulter takes a swipe

“I'm surprised Mercedes didn't win Team of the Year. Congrats Paul McGinley holding them off to win. Great Captain” – Ian Poulter (inset) has a side-swipe at Lewis Hamilton beating Rory McIlroy to the BBC Sports Personality award whilst congratulating McGinley on him being awarded the coach of the year accolade.

“Thank you to everyone for your support! Gutted to not have my full card! BUT

By the numbers

18

England's Charley Hull – who made history when making her Solheim Cup debut as a 17-year-old – became the youngest ever winner of the Ladies European Tour order of merit at the ripe old age of 18.

It has been a successful year! Can't wait for next year! :)” – Stephanie Meadow giving thanks to a fanbase which led to an overload of the ILGU server.

“It's been a good last day of school.” – Lee Westwood on wrapping up his season's work with a win in the Thailand Championship, the 41st professional win of his career.

Know the Rules

Q: A and B hit their balls into the same general area of a lateral water hazard. Both balls are lost in the hazard and therefore it is not known which ball is farther from the hole. However, B's ball last crossed the hazard margin farther from the hole than A's ball. What is the proper procedure?

A: The ball to be played first should be decided by lot, just as would be the case if the balls were equidistant from the hole.

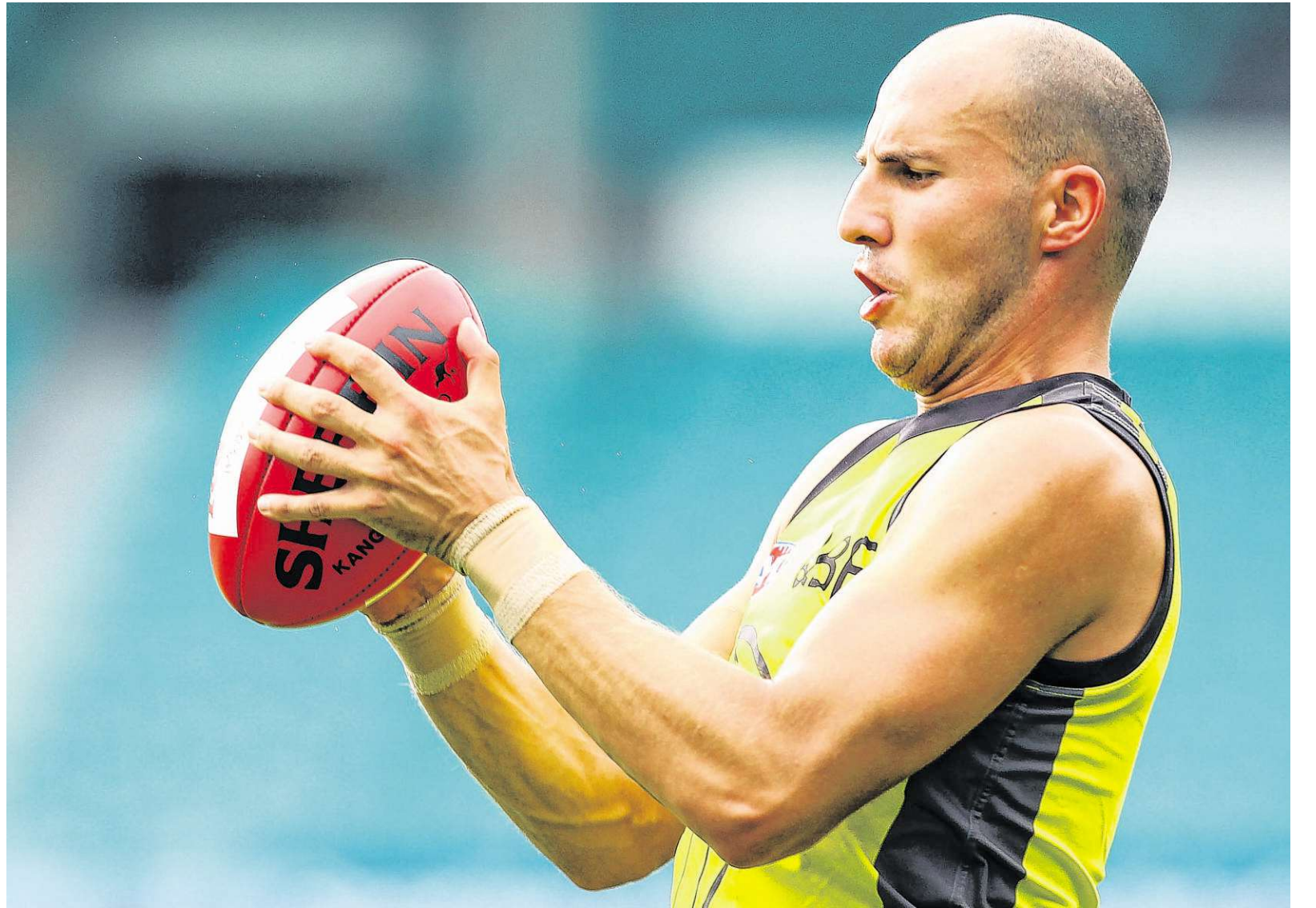
In the bag

LEE WESTWOOD

- Thailand Championship
- Driver: Ping G30 (10.5", Aldila XNV6 shaft)
- 3-Wood: Ping i15 (15", UST Mamiya ProForce V276X shaft)
- 20" Hybrid: (Aldila Tour Green 85X shaft)
- 4-9 Irons: Ping i20 (True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shafts)
- 48" Wedge: Ping i20 (True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shaft)
- 50" Wedge: Ping i20 (True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shaft)
- 54" Wedge: Ping i20 (True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shaft)
- 60" Wedge: Ping Tour Gorge (True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shaft)
- Putter: Ping Ketsch.
- Ball: Titleist Pro V1x



Gaelic Games Tadhg Kennelly



AFL still hunting young Irish talent

Ex-Kerry and Sydney Swans star in Ireland to assess another 22 young trialists at DCU

Kennelly expects the returning Tommy Walsh to be a huge asset for Kerry in 2015

EAMON DONOGHUE

Tadhg Kennelly was back in Ireland at the weekend, seeking out young GAA talent capable of making it as a professional footballer in the AFL.

The former Kerry and Sydney Swans player is one of the few Gaelic footballers to have made a successful and lasting transition to Australian Rules since the start of the 'Irish experiment' in 1982. Today he is the international talent co-ordinator for the AFL and from last Friday to Sunday the conductor of the third ever European AFL 'combine' hosted in DCU.

Recently, players such as Dublin's Ciarán Kilkenny and Westmeath's John Heslin have earned AFL contracts only to return home after less than four months. Others who have returned in the past 12 months include the Down duo of Marty Clarke and Caolan Mooney.

So for Kennelly, the challenge now is to highlight those who can combine their obvious talents with the mental attributes necessary to stick it out Down Under.

“I'm not really too concerned with the skill component, because the majority of Irish players are very, very skilful – I think it's more about their act-

ual character and how they keep themselves because it's a big move in so far as how they're going to handle being away from home. That's probably the biggest thing with Irish players.

“We now do a psyche profiling to profile how they'll cope being away from home and for all the other components of being a professional footballer and how will they handle that.”

“It is bloody hard and it's also hard to get clubs to buy into re-

“It's also hard to get clubs to buy into recruiting because the numbers don't stack up well as far as recruiting Irish players and them making the transition

cruting because the numbers don't stack up well as far as recruiting Irish players and them making the transition.

“What we try and do is get as close as we can as far as physical attributes, as far as mental attributes and just try and get to know the character of the young fella. His background,

his mother, his father, his brothers, his sisters, all that kind of stuff, gaining enough data on players so you can actually make a calculated decision or so we can help the clubs make the calculated decision rather.”

One of those calculated decisions was made by the St Kilda club in 2009 when they offered Kerry All-Ireland winner and All Star Tommy Walsh a two-year contract. Despite making five senior appearances after later transferring to Kennelly's former team Sydney Swans, his five years were hampered by injuries and he's decided to return home to the Kingdom for the 2015 season.

Sleepless nights

Kennelly knows exactly what lies ahead for Walsh, he returned home himself in 2009 to win an All-Ireland with Kerry.

“My body, I suppose, had almost adapted to being in the AFL and the kicking. I struggled a small bit with my skills components and the game coming back into it.”

“The biggest thing is – and I've said this to Tommy – is for people not to put a whole lot of pressure on him. I probably felt in 2009 that it was the most pressurised year of my life, and I'd spent 10 years of playing professional football and I'd felt nowhere near the pressure of an amateur footballer playing for Kerry – there's your argument's crazy stuff. You're dealing with playing in front of 80,000 every week yet the pressure that's put on you here is just immense and I had a lot of sleepless nights that year.

“I think you put a lot of expect-

tation on yourself too, I was a bit different to Tommy, he has a few All-Irelands and I hadn't and I was 29 and I wanted to win one. But there is a big expectation on Gaelic footballers and I think we get a small bit confused with what a soccer player does and a rugby player does in Ireland and we put them in the same bracket. But at the end of the day they've got to rock up on Monday morning and be a butcher, be a postman, be a teacher, whatever it is that you're dealing with the public.

“When you're a professional footballer you're hidden and cocooned from dealing with the public and if you play a poor game you don't have to front up Monday morning in front of them.”

Walsh, now 26, formed a lethal inside partnership for Kerry with fellow ‘twin tower’ Kieran Donaghy with Kerry. Yet with five years of professionalism behind him Kennelly cannot see his former team-mate being consigned to the edge of the square on his return.

“I'd see it as highly unlikely that you'd see him playing at full forward, for me I think he's got the running capabilities of anyone now. I think he'd probably outrun Donnchadh Walsh who's probably Kerry's fittest player. He's just a beast of a man.

“You will probably see him anywhere from cen-

■ Tadhg Kennelly during his time at Sydney Swans and (inset) Kerry minor player Killian Spillane who attended AFL trials recently.

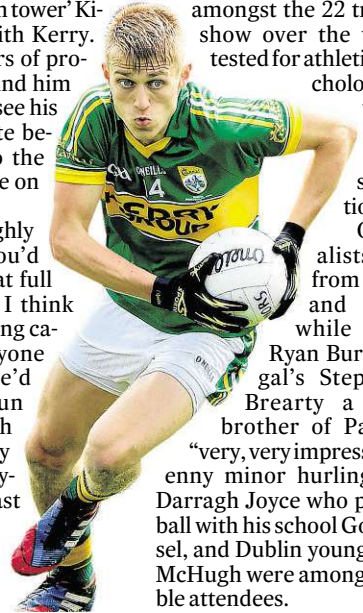
PHOTOGRAPH: MARK NOLAN/GETTY IMAGES

tre back to midfield to on the 40, for me he could easily be out and about and because of his size he'd be the biggest man in the competition by a long shot.”

The prospect

Just as Walsh, the son of dual Kerry All Star, Seán, returns to the delight of the Kerry faithful, the county face the prospect of losing another Kerry son of pedigree in Killian Spillane, a nephew of all-time great Pat. He is one of four Kerry All-Ireland winning minors who were amongst the 22 trialists on show over the weekend, tested for athletic and psychological traits and during match simulation tasks.

Other trialists hailed from Denmark and England, while Louth's Ryan Burns, Donegal's Stephen McBrearty a younger brother of Paddy, the “very, very impressive” Kilkenny minor hurling captain Darragh Joyce who plays football with his school Good Counsel, and Dublin youngster Eoin McHugh were among the notable attendees.



Gaelic Games St Vincent's

Brennan happy to keep going for club and county

EAMON DONOGHUE

It's been a year of seemingly constant positives for St Vincent's, All-Ireland club champions, back-to-back county and provincial titles, the only problem for them is that they're still going.

For the club's intercounty stars such as Ger Brennan and Diarmuid Conolly it's been a 12-month-long season. The rest of the panel had just a five day turnaround from the 2013 All-Ireland final in March to the commencement of their next round of league games for the 2014 season, which at that point was already in full swing.

The result was fatigue, frustration, injuries, and for those fighting for an intercounty breakthrough the consequence of prolonged success means that for a number of St Vincent's play-

ers their opportunity in a Dublin jersey may have long passed them by come next February or even March.

“Certainly guys who are looking to establish themselves in a panel it is naturally going to hurt,” explains club captain Ger Brennan. “Maybe myself and Diarmuid we have been playing for a couple of years, the management would be pretty much aware of what we can offer. That's the reality of the season as it is at present. I'm hearing that we are looking to shorten and condense the season to one calendar year which would give an opportunity to those players.

“If everything was shortened, you could play two All-Ireland club semi-finals on a Saturday in the middle of November and have the two hurling semi-finals on a Sunday and have the finals at the end of November or the

first weekend in December. You could have a double header in Croke Park.”

Brennan has been playing through the pain barrier for the



■ Ger Brennan: St Vincent's man will delay plans for surgery as he seeks more silverware

past year but the centre-back will delay plans of surgery in search of more silverware. But his body hasn't always kept up and he did not feature in any of last year's championship games for Dublin.

“I picked up an Achilles thing towards Paddy's Day last year. When I went back with Dublin it really hurt in training. It can be

constant... Going into games it would be particularly sore and then after games it would swell up. There is the option of a procedure but that could put me back a few more weeks. So I am not going to do that.”

Intensity

A mainstay in the team's half back line particularly during the Pat Gilroy era, in recent times his injuries have swept away any assurances regarding that number six Dublin jersey. Jim Gavin has other options in the position, albeit his defence-first thinking was lacking when Donegal exposed them in last summer's All-Ireland semi-final.

“If it didn't clear up I was knackered because you couldn't play at that intensity and not have your full wits about you. I'm going to rest up now (over Christmas). I won't do a whole

lot of running over the next few weeks, stay in the gym, cycling, swimming to keep aerobically fit. You learn to deal with these things and how to cope with them. You have to tailor your training regime to ensure that you are fit come the game. I will continue to do that.”

Brennan insists that injury concerns have not stunted his ambitions in a Dublin jersey, he's setting the bar high for both club and county once more in 2015.

“I want to finish playing on a high. I want to win another Leinster and All-Ireland in the county. I want to win it by playing and not sitting on the sideline or coming in or out. That's my personal aim and that's something I will have to work on to put questions in Jim Gavin's mind to make sure that I am in the team. I will worry about that after this run with the club.”

Results round-up

Basketball

NBA: Denver Nuggets 91 San Antonio 98, Miami Heat 75 Chicago Bulls 93, Minnesota Timberwolves 94 LA Lakers 100, New Orleans 122 Golden State Warriors 128 (OT), New York Knicks 90 Toronto Raptors 95 (OT), Oklahoma City 112 Phoenix Suns 88, Washington Wizards 93 Utah Jazz 84.

Gaelic Games

South Leinster PP Sch SF “D” second

Leinster PP Sch SF “A” – Second round draw: Dundalk Schools v Wicklow Schools/Wexford Schools; Col Mhuire Mullingar v Knockbeg College; Good Counsel College v Ardara; Trionaidhe Athy; 4 St. Mary's Edenderry v Colaiste Eoin; Patricia Newbridge v Moate CS; St. Joseph's Rochford v Bridge v St. Mel's Longford; St. Peter's Wexford v St. Aidan's; Marist Col. Athlone v St. Pat's Navan. Ties to be played Friday, Jan 9th.

Rugby

LEINSTER SCHOOLS SENIOR DEVELOP-

round: Col Eoin Hacketstown 0-16, Kilkenny Schools 4-02, North Leinster PP Sch Juv F “C” semi-final: Mercy SS Ballymahon 4-11, Ardee CS 1-11, North Leinster PP Sch SF “B” first round: Ashbourne CS 2-12 St. Joseph's Drogheda 3-07, North Leinster PP Sch Juv F “B” semi-final: St. Mary's Edenderry 4-13 Dundalk DLS 0-06.

Tennis

ATP Rankings: 1 Novak Djokovic (Ser) 11360; 2 Roger Federer (Swi) 9775; 3 Rafa Nadal (Spa) 6835; 4 Stan Wawrinka (Swi) 5370; 5 Kei

MENT CUP FINAL REPLAY. At Donnybrook: Colaiste Chill Mhantain 32 (C Connolly 2 tries; F Ward, T Maguire, B Fleming try each; D Nicholson pen. 2 cons); Dundalk Grammar 24 (S McGivern 2 tries; J Torris, C Quinn try each; C Lawson 2 cons).

Tennis

ATP Rankings: 1 Novak Djokovic (Ser) 11360; 2 Roger Federer (Swi) 9775; 3 Rafa Nadal (Spa) 6835; 4 Stan Wawrinka (Swi) 5370; 5 Kei

Nishikori (Jap) 5025; 6 Andy Murray (Brit) 4675; 7 Tomas Berdych (Czech Rep) 4600; 8 Milos Raonic (Can) 4440; 9 Marin Cilic (Cro) 4150; 10 David Ferrer (Spa) 4045.

WTA Rankings: 1 Serena Williams (US) 8485; 2 Maria Sharapova (Rus) 7050; 3 Simona Halep (Rom) 6292; 4 Petra Kvitova (Czech Rep) 5868; 5 Ana Ivanovic (Ser) 4920; 6 Agnieszka Radwanska (Pol) 4810; 7 Eugenie Bouchard (Can) 4715; 8 Caroline Wozniacki (Den) 4625; 9 Angelique Kerber (Ger) 3480; 10 Dominika Cibulkova (Slo) 3052.