

PAUL MCGINLEY

– Interview by Velvet Garvey, Qatar



McGINLEY

Paul McGinley's entrance into the world of professional golf was unconventional. While he showed early potential, it was for a different sport – Gaelic football. But as a rising star, a knee injury excluded him from the sport he loved. With a need to channel his passion and athletic talent he turned to golf and quickly rose up the ranks from amateur to pro.

But the ethos of football never left him, and throughout his career he has excelled in the team events and earned a reputation as a good sportsman and great leader. Thanks to this reputation he has recently been awarded one of golf's highest honours: the captaincy of the European Ryder Cup team. Known as a quiet achiever, here he talks about his constant injury, the changing game and the one thing on tour he can't live without.



Firstly congratulations on your recent captaincy.
Thank you. I am thrilled. Absolutely thrilled!

You started golf with an injury which is quite rare in an athlete. Tell us about your time playing Gaelic football and the injury you suffered?

Gaelic football was what I started with. If you had asked me as a young boy, would I have been a professional golfer by the time I was 18 years old, I would have said absolutely no way. There's more chance of me going to the moon than being a professional golfer. I wasn't bad at golf – about an 8 handicap – but I was really good at Gaelic football. I was going to play in the very top level but then I

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 2013** Named captain of 2014 European Ryder Cup Team
- 2012** 2nd victory serving as Ryder Cup Vice Captain (2010, 2012)
- 2011** 2nd victory as Captain of Great Britain & Ireland in the Vivendi Seve Trophy against Continental Europe (2009, 2011)
- 2007** Won his 2nd Royal Trophy (2006, 2007)
- 2006** Europe won Ryder Cup, making McGinley the first European Golfer to be a winner in every one of his three appearances (2002, 2004, 2006)
- 2005** Won the Volvo Masters (Spain)
- 2005** Won 2nd Vivendi Seve Trophy (2002, 2005)
- 2003** Won his 4th Irish PGA Championship
- 2002** Holed a 10-foot putt on the 18th hole to win the Ryder Cup for Europe
- 2001** Won the Celtic Manor Resort Wales Open in a playoff. The event was shortened to 36 holes due to torrential rain.
- 1997** Won Oki Pro Am
- 1997** Won the World Cup of Golf for Ireland
- 1996** Won first title on the European Tour (Hohe Brücke Open)
- 1991** Turned professional

broke my knee cap and I did a lot of damage around it. I have had 8 operations on it since. Well, 6 on one knee, 2 on the other.

That injury and being told that I could no longer play football meant that I had to redirect my desire and my competitiveness in a completely different direction. It was going to be all Gaelic football and all of a sudden all that energy that I was putting into football got driven into golf. I started to play golf 12 months of the year and got down to scratch handicap quite quickly.

It also meant that I could study. With a degree in Marketing already, I studied International Business at a college in America where I could study and play. At the time I didn't know if I was going to be good enough to turn pro but I knew that after 2 years in America I would

either go into business or be good enough to play golf. I needed that time to prove to myself that I was good enough as a golfer and I did. I dominated the amateur scene in Ireland and had a good college career in America and that's why I turned pro.

Has that injury affected you throughout your golf career?

Yes, no doubt.

Do you have a regimen that you follow for your knee injury?

For me, it's about maintenance now. I do a lot of swimming and have cut back on my gym work. Over the years I have done a lot of work building up the muscle around my knee and getting it strong.

But the bottom line is, the debris still breaks off the patella every now and again and floats around, so every 2 years I have to go in for an arthroscopic procedure and have it cleaned out and tidied up. So there is no cartilage left, it's just bone on bone. Right now, as I'm sitting, I can feel it. On the golf course it's fine. It's not pain that is the problem, it is the anticipation of pain that makes me get in bad positions with my swing and basically back off it. It is my left knee. So it's the same as Tiger's (Woods), same as Ernie's (Els). If you're a golfer and you're going to have a knee injury, the right is the one to have it on, not the left because all the impact goes through the left.

You must have a really good relationship with your surgeon if you have to go back every 2 years!

Yeah! There are two surgeons that I have used: one in Ireland and one in England. One of them especially, I know very well. I'm at the stage where they can help me in an emergency, like last year I had to pull out of a tournament because my knee was inflamed, which it does now and again when the fluid builds up. Usually I have to get that fluid drained off but last year I had a cortisone injection just to calm it down a bit. If there is any problem at all I get onto my surgeon and he sees me straight away, even if it is 7 am before his clinic opens. He will get me in, do an MRI, check it all out and see where we are at and give me advice on what to do.

Would you say that has affected your attitude towards preventing injuries?

Yes. Although I worked with a trainer, I think a lot of the damage I did over the years was when I was doing stuff of my own. It was when I wasn't paying enough attention to form or to technique in terms of lifting weights and that kind of stuff. It was more about getting in, getting the reps done and getting out. One of the lessons I learned is that I should have paid real attention to getting the technique 100% correct. Some of my injuries were caused by poor technique and going through the routine, rather than being really specific about getting the technique perfect.

You have been playing for 21 years. How has the game changed from a physical point of view?

Massively. The physical change and the physical specimens of the guys on tour nowadays are completely different. Body shapes are so different. Guys are so much younger, so much more athletic and so much more powerful. The guys spend so much more time in the gym. When I came on tour 5% of players, maybe less, worked in the gym. Now, I would say 97% of players work in the gym.

What do you think it takes for those young guys to become number 1?

Well there is no doubt about it: a power game is essential. The game is so much easier if you're powerful nowadays and a lot of the modern technology is very much allied with fast club head



Image: Paul McGinley playing a bunker shot during The TCL Classic at Yalong Bay Golf Club, China, 2007.

speed. So, the better you swing the club and the faster you swing the club, you get more out of modern technology. Having said that, the shorter hitters can still compete and some shorter hitters do, but you need to have a very strong short game and strong mind if you're going to compete when you're a shorter hitter, whereas it is a distinct advantage if you can hit the ball a long way in the modern game.

Charlie Beljan drew some attention to his nutrition this year and said that he is going to start focussing on eating well. What is your attitude to nutrition?

My grandmother used to say to me, "a little bit of everything won't do you any harm". So, if I fancy an ice cream, I have an ice cream. If I fancy a bar of chocolate I have a bar of chocolate, but I won't overdo it. From my own experience (this isn't everybody's opinion) but for me, if I punish myself by never having any chocolate and I eat and

“ ***I think a lot of the damage I did was when I wasn't paying enough attention to form or to technique when training*** ”

go to the gym and do everything 100% and my whole life revolves around my golf, then I become a poorer player because I don't have the 'feel good' factor.

I don't have any hard or fast rules, except when it comes to breakfast. I have porridge every single morning. I travel with it on tour. If I'm going to somewhere like China, where I know they don't have porridge, I bring my own sachets. Also, my cousin makes great oatmeal cookies so I take them with me to snack on. They are pure oatmeal with some raisins in them, no sugar or anything. I had them this morning for breakfast. They're great because they're easy and I have to base my eating times around my tee time.

Do you have anyone who gives you nutritional advice?

Yeah, I have sought advice in the past and used nutritionists so I am aware now what is best for me. The only problem is that if you listen to a nutritionist, their advice is so strict so I take a little bit from it but also focus on just feeling good.

As a golfer you shine in the team events. Do you think that Gaelic football had something to do with that?

No doubt. The team ethos of Gaelic football was instilled in me from when I started playing at about 4 years old. Gaelic football is an Irish game played only in Ireland, except for Irish expats who play it



Image: Paul McGinley and the European team after winning the 2006 Ryder Cup in Ireland.

Image: McGinley tees off on the 9th hole during the 138th Open Championship on the Ailsa Course, Turnberry Golf Club, Scotland 2009.

Image right: European Team members following their victory in the 2010 Ryder Cup at the Celtic Manor Resort, Wales.

Image bottom: McGinley lining up his putt on the second hole during The KLM Open at Kennemer Golf & Country Club, Netherlands, 2009.



abroad. It is deeply ingrained into the Irish culture and it's all about the team – the closeness of the players and the bonds that they form is what makes a great team.

Do you think there is an argument for athletes specialising in more than one sport?

Definitely. I have a 12-year-old son who is very good at golf and cricket and rugby and soccer. I want him to play every kind of sport. I don't want him to specialise. If he gets to 15 or 16 and he starts getting serious about becoming competitive, maybe then he can specialise.

Growing up in Dublin, I played a wide variation of sports like golf, Gaelic hurling, soccer, running and swimming. All of those sports were very important in my development. Also, I think it's kind of sad if a kid specialises in one sport from an age of 10 or 11 to the exclusion of every other. I don't think that's the right thing to do and I never encourage it when people ask me for advice about if kids show a good skill level in golf. I always say to just keep playing other sports, keep forming bonds with other people and be competitive in different arenas. Because the competitiveness you learn in different arenas can still be brought to your golf game. Golf is not just about hitting the golf ball around – it's the ability to compete and you can learn that by playing other sports too.

You famously conceded a putt to J.J. Henry at the Ryder cup in 2006. How important is good sportsmanship to you?

Of course it's important. I feel that I live my life being a very fair and open person and I like to think that I play sport in the same way. The putt that I conceded in the Ryder Cup was for no other reason than a fan ran onto the green and obstructed the other golfer's line as he was trying to line up the putt. The match was all over and I was done, but more importantly, Henry wasn't getting a fair chance to hole his putt because this guy was grabbing all of the attention and damaging his line. That's why I conceded it. I wasn't very popular because a lot of people had me backed to win and I only had a half game instead of a win! A lot of people have mentioned that to me since but I don't regret it. It was the right thing to do under those circumstances.

When you are on tour do you travel with a medical team?

No, I use the physios on tour. They're very good and they know my knee as well as anybody by this stage. We also have a doctor that travels with the tour and he is very familiar with my injuries as well. The main thing now is avoiding making it worse. I'm never going to make it any better; it is never going to be 100%. So I need to maintain it through proper physio, making sure that the muscles around it remain strong, and doing low impact stuff like swimming. I do very little gym work now, so stretching and swimming are the two things that maintain me.

I think it's sad if a kid specialises in one sport



Do you have a coach who travels with you?

My coach is Bob Torrance but he doesn't travel with me because he is in his 80s now. He has coached me all my career and he will be my coach until one of us goes to the 'fairways' in the sky!

I have a great relationship with him. He's a very strong character. I really admire him and love being in his company. We have a personal relationship. There are a number of people I seek advice from and get their opinions too, but ultimately Bob is my coach and he will always be so.

How do you train for the mental side of the game?

I don't think you train for it. I think you have that instinct in you from a young age. I think what you need to do is remain fresh. You want to prepare your mental game so that when you get on the golf course, you feel like a greyhound. You want that 'freshness' as a golfer.

What does it take to be a good golfer?

A wide variety of things. You have to be physically fit, mentally fit and mentally tough. You've got to have a good technical golf game and you have got to be well-managed and have good council around you from friends and family. It is the whole package – it's not just one or two things. As great as we think we are, we are not good enough to do it on our own. We need good people around us.

Velvet Garvey