

WATC FEATURE

The world comes to Carton House for the World Amateur Team Championships in 2018, marking the first staging of this iconic event in Ireland since the championship was first played at St Andrews in 1958.

Now, 60 years later, Ireland plays host for the first time to the world's leading amateurs and the spectacular 36-hole resort at Carton House will provide the perfect setting. With two courses – the classic parkland of the O'Meara and the links-styled Montgomerie – and each one demanding in differing ways by virtue of their sharply contrasting features, Carton will be transformed into a golfing hub for the two weeks of competition.

The charming O'Meara Course is alluring but its manicured look masks a world of terror around the greens, which, when cut tightly reward only the most precise iron shots and the purest of putting strokes. The medal-winning teams will make many birdies but will hope to avoid bogeys, and worse, which are inevitable when shots go astray around the stunning stretch of water holes from 14 through 16, known locally as Amen Corner.

A daunting prospect awaits on the Montgomerie Course. After an unprecedented summer of searing heat, the "Monty" has taken on the feel of a seaside links with its fast-running fairways and unforgiving fescue rough. It makes for a prohibitive environment off the tee yet players encounter most of the obstacles when playing to the greens. Montgomerie has been carefully populated with pot bunkers – 127 in all – and these cavernous hollows can radically alter a score.

Maintaining concentration is key around O'Meara. A lush, radiant spectacle, O'Meara disarms with its charms, and then plays havoc with a score when the round is almost complete. With the pressure mounting and medals on the line, expect dramatic twists and turns when the players come to negotiate Carton's slice of Augusta.

By contrast, the Montgomerie is relentless in its demands. The first, the third and the fifth rank among the toughest holes on the course and those who come through that run with their card unblemished will have played some outstanding golf. With the deep, fairway bunkers acting as hazards, it is imperative to play for position. When the wind is blowing hard, the 'Monty' presents a stern challenge though there are chances to score on the back nine.

The driveable par-four 13th offers a shot at eagle if players take it on. And with two par-fives before the finish, it is possible to mount a late charge. At the European Amateur Championship in 2012 Rhys Pugh from Wales made an eagle at 15 and birdied 16 and 18 on his way to a closing round of 66 for a one-shot victory. England's Paul Casey holed a 45-foot eagle putt at the last in the final round to seal his win at the 2013 Irish Open.

As the venue for this year's World Amateur Team Championships, Carton House continues its recent tradition of hosting big golf tournaments having staged the Irish Open three times since 2004. Many famous guests have also passed through the gates of Carton including Queen Victoria, Princess Grace of Monaco and pop icon Marianne Faithful, who was a resident of the Shell Cottage (situated above the 15th green on the O'Meara Course) for seven years during the 1990s.

The lands at Carton belonged to the Maynooth estate of the FitzGerald family from 1176 and the FitzGeralds were made Earls of Kildare in 1315, becoming one of the most influential families in the country over the course of the next eight centuries. The FitzGerald family reached pre-eminence as the virtual rulers of Ireland between 1477 and 1513. In the latter part of the 20th century the estate was purchased and developed by the Mallaghan family who had the foresight to build the two golf courses and hotel which opened in 2005.

In October 2017, Carton House hotel and golf resort was bought by Irish-American businessman, John Mullen. The son of emigrants from County Mayo, he is the founder and chairman of the Philadelphia-based Apple Leisure Group.

The 1,100-acre walled estate stretches across two counties: Kildare and Meath. Playing the first on Monty, the River Rye runs in front of the teeing ground, making visible the county border line, and inviting players to strike their opening shot from Meath into Kildare.

Away from the golf course, the Championship Village at Maynooth University will add an Olympic Village Theme. Here, the majority of the Official Championship Accommodation will be housed. Situated just three kilometres from Carton estate, the historic setting of Maynooth University will give players a feel for the rich heritage of the town of Maynooth.

Maynooth Castle, which dates from the 13th century and served as the home of the FitzGerald family, provides an impressive entrance for the university, which is also home to St Patrick's College. The college opened its doors as an educational institution in 1795 as the National Seminary, becoming a Pontifical University in 1896.

Today, Maynooth Castle lies in ruins but Maynooth is a prosperous, vibrant town with a rich mix of dining and cultural venues. In 2017, Maynooth became the first university town in Ireland, and one of 23 towns and cities across the island, to achieve Purple Flag status – an internationally accredited award for excellence in the nightlife of a town or city.

The real action takes place on the course and the host country will be buoyed by its achievements in Mexico two years ago when the men's and ladies teams claimed bronze medals. In 2018, the Republic of Korea are defending champions having won its fourth Espirito Santo Trophy by a record-equalling margin of 21 strokes at Mayakoba El Camaleon two years ago.

Australia come to Carton on the back of winning its fourth Eisenhower Trophy in Mexico, where they finished 19 strokes clear and tied the 72-hole scoring record of 38-under-par.

SIDEBARS

ESPIRITO SANTO TROPHY

What began as a proposal match in 1964 between the USA and France grew into the Women's World Amateur Team Championship. A total of 25 teams and 75 players participated. The Espirito Santo Trophy was presented in 1964 as the prize for the Women's World Amateur Team Championship by Silvia Espirito Santo Silva of the Ricardo Espirito Santo family of Portugal.

EISENHOWER TROPHY

The USGA suggested a team competition that would bring together the best players of all countries. In March, 1958 a group of USGA representatives met with officials of The R&A and from that meeting St Andrews was proposed as the site of the first World Amateur Team Championship. The Eisenhower Trophy is named for the 34th President of the United States of America, Dwight D Eisenhower.

NOTABLE RECORDS

Jack Nicklaus, who represented the USA in 1960 at Merion Golf Club (East Course) held the 72-hole individual scoring record of 269 for 54 years until Jon Rahm of Spain shot 70-64-62-67 for 23-under-par 263 in 2014 at Karuizawa Golf Club in Japan.

Lydia Ko, who represented New Zealand in 2012 at Gloria Golf Club in Antalya, Turkey, holds the individual 72-hole scoring record of 274.

PROMINENT PAST PLAYERS

Annika Sorenstam (Sweden), Se Ri Pak (Republic of Korea), Karrie Webb (Australia), Lorena Ochoa (Mexico), Ai Miyazato (Japan), Paula Creamer (USA), Sandra Gal (Germany), Melissa Reid (England), Lydia Ko (New Zealand); Paul Dunne (Ireland), Tiger Woods (USA), Rory McIlroy (Ireland), Sergio Garcia (Spain), Colin Montgomerie (GB&I), Phil Mickelson (USA), Charl Schwartzel and Louis Oosthuizen (South Africa), Eduardo and Francesco Molinari (Italy).

FORMAT

Each team has two or three players, who each play 18 holes of stroke play over four days. In each round, the total of the two lowest scores from each team constitutes the team score for the round. The four-day (72-hole) total is the team's score for the championship.

SCHEDULE OF PLAY

During the Espirito Santo Trophy competition for women, 18 holes of stroke play will be conducted Wednesday 29 August through Saturday 1 September. Similarly, 18 holes of stroke play will be conducted Wednesday 5 September through Saturday 8 September. for the Eisenhower Trophy competition for men.