

INSIDE TRACK – VALDERRAMA



Time out with...
Javier Reviriego

Javier Reviriego, General Manager of Spain's iconic Valderrama, admits to being being a workaholic. As vices go, it's not a bad one to have. Here he shares his views on management, business life and the universe with CLUBHOUSE EUROPE's Caroline Scoular.



Q You've been at Valderrama now since July 2011. What would you say were your biggest challenges when you first arrived?

There were many challenges. The first was of course the pressure of living up to the reputation of Valderrama. It is legendary place and the expectations from members and visitors are extremely high.

Q And from a management perspective?

From a management point of view the main issues were staffing, financials, the course itself and service. Beginning with the staff; most employees had been at the club for a long time and some were lacking motivation and direction. Also, many staff had a completely different business or corporate mentality to mine. I had to do a lot of training, and I changed the organisation chart so that everyone had very clear responsibilities. We also faced the challenge of being over-staffed in many areas, so we initiated a plan to reduce the staff levels and improve productivity. This was probably the toughest part of the job since we had to lay off some staff.

Q You mentioned the financials. What did you face there?

The club was not in great financial health when I started two years ago. We had member attrition, lower green fee sales and very high operational costs. In 2011, together with my Board, we developed a three year business plan that included higher green fees and pro-shop sales, lower operating costs and a new membership plan. We have managed to reduce general expenses by over €1 million and our green fee/pro-shop sales have increased by more than 20%. The club has basically gone from yearly losses to a very respectable operating profit that is allowing us to make investments.

Q Everyone reading this magazine will appreciate the iconic nature of the course itself. Would I be right in thinking there wasn't much work to do here?

We all know that Valderrama is a fantastic course with a great reputation but the fact is that there had been no investment for the last few years. In order to elevate the quality of the course and maintain our prestige, we developed a five year investment plan to upgrade the course and facilities. So far we have installed a brand new pumping station and we are currently in the process of remodelling all the bunkers on the course. Many more works will follow to make Valderrama even better.

Q So with staffing streamlined, financials under control what else had to be done to raise the game?

Valderrama has always been known for the golf course but not so much for its service. My goal since I started working here has been to have the same comments about our service as about our course. We are now offering a full Valderrama experience – not only on the course but also on the other amenities. We are now providing fantastic F&B service and attention to our members and clients. We cannot expect to charge €300 for our green fees if we do not provide a full five star experience.

Q One of the other major changes this year to life at the club, of course, must have been when founder Jaime Ortiz Patiño died in January.

Well, obviously it was a very emotional moment when he passed away for staff and members. He was very respected by everyone and his legacy is fantastic. We received many emails and letters from all over the World as well as requests from journalists and different media.

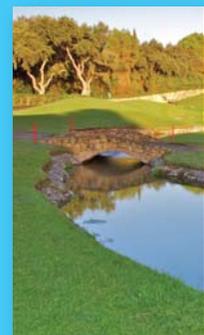
A DAY IN THE LIFE

I normally arrive at the club between 8 and 9am. The first thing I always do is walk around the club and speak to the staff. Then I usually take a buggy and drive at least 9 holes around the course.



Breakfast is always work related, normally with the Greenkeeper or Operations Manager. I check emails and then I usually set up meetings (never more than two per day). I try to be very visible for members around the club in the 'hot hours' (between 12 and 4pm). The afternoon is usually spent in the office, working with my staff on different issues.

I normally leave the club around 8pm, unless we have a special dinner or function at the club in which case it will be later.



Every Tuesday I also have a Heads of Department meeting with the staff. We meet and discuss issues and upcoming events. Even if we have no major issues, I like to meet to see how everyone is doing. Many times we find ourselves even talking about matters not related to the club, the main thing is that we have a relaxed 30 or 45 minutes and that everybody feels like we are a 'team on a mission'.

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Señor Patiño was not involved in the management the last few years but he very much enjoyed going on the course and making suggestions to the Greenkeeper and me. He always had a special eye and was able to analyse the condition of the course in great detail. He is very much missed and much remembered.

Q What are the current objectives/priorities for Valderrama?

Now that our financial situation is healthy and we have the proper staff structure to face the future our main objective at the moment is to raise the level of quality of the course and the service we provide.

Q What would you say is the best thing about your job to date?

I'd say it's the welcome I have received from the members and also seeing that the hard work is paying off and we are having positive results.

Q And the worst thing?

Having to dismiss some staff members during the restructuring phase.

Q If you weren't running Valderrama, what would be your top three courses/resorts you'd like to run?

Pebble Beach, Pine Valley & Olympic.



ON GOLF TOURISM

Q. What percentage of business comes from golf tourism?

A. 30%. Of this, 30% is domestic, 70% is 'rest of Europe'.

Q. How do you achieve the perfect balance between members, visiting players, 'tourism' and Tournaments?

A. Lots of planning and communication...and patience.

Q. How do you maintain the Valderrama exclusivity?

A. Protect the brand. You must always make sure you oversee how others are selling your course (images used, text used, etc.). The most important thing is to maintain quality at all levels. And if you overcharge clients the market will eventually 'hit' you (Quality always wins).

PERCENTAGE OF BUSINESS REVENUES?

- Membership 50%
- Food & Beverage (all forms)10%
- Green Fees 25%
- Pro-Shop 15%

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES?

We want to continue to improve. Our goal is to offer the best possible experience for our members and visitors.

BIGGEST ISSUES?

VAT is a big issue (VAT increase on Green-Fees increased from 8 to 21% in 2012). Also the lack of professional tournaments that promote the game and the destinations.

ON TRAINING?

I'm a great believer in training at all levels. A good professional should never stop learning and getting better. CMAE is a good example, proper training - and specific to golf industry - can only bring good things for the sector.

Better Managers = Better Companies



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Where were you born?

Madrid.

Education?

Florida A & M University / Florida State University.

What is your biggest strength?

Hard to answer that. I guess it would be that I'm very determined and have great self-confidence.

Weakness?

I'm a workaholic. This is not good.

First ever job?

On a golf course, helping the maintenance crew.

Who has been your biggest influence in your working life?

My father.

What book are you reading?

Steve Jobs biography.

All time favourite film?

The Godfather.

What is the first record you ever bought?

The Joshua Tree - U2.

What gadgets couldn't you live without?

i-phone and lap-top.

If you had only five items of food to live on for a week what would they be?

Fruit, pasta, steak, bread and any kind of cheese.

Favourite drink after a hard day at work?

Red wine - Rioja.

How do you relax?

Spending time with my wife and daughters (seven and four years old), playing golf and going to dinner with friends.

Where will you go on holiday?

Always the US.

What will you do on your next day off?

Day off??? What is that??? (Play golf with friends!)

If you won the lotto - what would be your first purchase?

Time (if possible)



What is your dream car?

Aston Martin.

If you had to choose another career (not golf-related) what would it be?

Finance.

If Mariano Rajoy OR Brussels offered you three wishes on behalf of the golf club industry what would they be?

Campaign to promote the environment.

Biggest changes you've noticed in the golf sector in the past 3 years?

Internet bookings, more demand from different areas and environmental awareness.

Favourite golf club outside Spain?

Seminoles, Florida, USA.

Who else do you admire in the golf world?

I admire the CEO of the US PGA Tour. It is definitely a position I would like have in the future... also the European Tour..

