Glory in Europe But Tough Going at Home

As winners of the 1980 Irish Senior Cup at Lahinch, Limerick GC was invited to represent Ireland in the European Clubs Cup for the Kas Trophy at Santa Ponsa, Majorca on November 26th to 29th. Hereunder is a selection of edited reports.

"It is all so rarely that Irishmen in any branch of sport achieve fame and renown in a European context that it has surprised many that Limerick Golf Club's annexation of the European Clubs Cup last weekend hasn't received more attention nationwide. Following as tense a battle as could be imagined that lasted four, punishing days with teams from 16 other nations, Limerick's win was a marvelous achievement. Two scores from three were counted in each of the four rounds of stroke play. The balance of the Limerick team was perfect with two players contributing three scores and one discard, while the third man had two counting scores and two discards. Had any two players slipped up on the same day all would have been lost." – ***Limerick Leader, December 6, 1980.***

"Limerick became the first Irish Club to win the European Club Championship in Majorca played in dreadful conditions of high winds, severe cold and occasional snow flurries. A total of 620 just ousted the holders from Germany by one stroke. The outcome depended on the last man on the golf course during Saturday's final round. Jackie Harrington was the hero over the first two rounds before being laid low by illness, which seriously hampered him thereafter. Barely able to walk, Harrington came to the 17th needing two pars to clinch victory. He dropped a shot at the 17th only to fashion a magnificent birdie at the 18th that was greeted by loud cheers from the 25-strong Limerick contingent. The team was completed by Ivan Morris, the backbone of the side in rounds 3 and 4, and Vincent Nevin."
– ***Cork Examiner, Monday, December 1, 1980.***

Here's what the non-playing captain of the Limerick team, Pat Cotter, had to say about it on his return from Santa Ponsa.

"One shot! How often have I seen that precious numeral separate the superstar from the also ran? With us holding what looked like an impregnable lead of 7-strokes before starting the fourth and final round I made a deal with Jackie, Vincent and Ivan that I wouldn't bother them with any scores information unless we got caught up in a knife edge finish.

"As it happened, I did not have to open my mouth until the 18th tee on this brute of a course that measured 7200-yards. I could hardly believe it when, out of nowhere, the German team (Falkenstein GC, Hamburg) caught us. This was just after I had incorrectly told Ivan, who had manfully shaken off the trauma of taking a 9 at the 10th hole, that we were two ahead but his score was needed and for him 'to be careful.' Taking no chances, he played the dangerous, 18th 'conservatively' for a bogey 5 and an excellent score of 80, considering the conditions. With Vincent in the clubhouse having suffered 'torments' in an uncharacteristic 87, it was all down to Jackie playing in the final group. I compounded my earlier error by telling Jackie we were now one behind but we weren't; we were tied!

"The coolest man in Majorca launched a soaring, straight-as-a-die 5-iron that defied gravity before alighting beside the flagstick, that was seemingly perched right on top of a large bunker etched into the elevated green. Walking towards the green I corrected my error and told Jackie that his 15-foot putt was for victory not a tie. With the final green ringed by Limerick's anxious, 25-traveling supporters plus interested members of the other teams, Jackie remained unfazed and rolled the ball to the edge of the hole where it hesitated for a moment before dropping in. It will remain my most cherished golfing memory forever.

"Wednesday: In warm sunshine, Harrington was in scintillating form returning the second best individual score of the day. Ably backed up by Ivan Morris (76) and Vincent Nevin (77), our 149 total put us 1-stroke ahead of Italy and Germany.

"Thursday: A noticeable change in the weather, saw Jackie continuing to play flawlessly for another 73 and Vincent, despite having difficulty on the vast, speedy greens backed him up with a solid 78, which surprisingly gave us a 6-strokes halfway lead.

"Friday: During breakfast it was snowing outside but Ivan had discovered that there was a Flea Market around the corner from the hotel. He went out and bought three wooly hats and sheepskin-lined gloves, which were invaluable in the windy, Arctic conditions. Suitably insulated, Limerick increased their lead by a further stroke thanks to Ivan's foresight and fighting 77 and Vincent's steady 79. Jackie had picked up 'Spanish tummy' and fallen ill. Barely able to walk, he struggled to a non-counting 84.

"Saturday: Jackie was still ill but he dragged himself around in another 84 which when added to Ivan's heroic 80, despite dropping 7-strokes at two holes, was good enough for a famous 1-stroke victory. Champions of Europe!"