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Li Leader

Leinster House and the adjoining Government Buildings at this time every year. In the first place, the TDs and senators clear off until sometime between the All-Ireland football final and Hallowe'en.

Yes, we know their protestations about Dail committees continuing work in July and September, and I fully accept that the constituency work is arduous and relentless.

But let's record two facts here: Firstly, the Dail and Seanad chambers are closed until late September, with the only ones working there being painters, upholsterers or other artisans. Secondly, as they leave, the Government has rammed through a whole raft of legislation with little or no debate.

But I digress. I was about to say that there are things I like about Leinster House in July and August. I realise that sounds a bit like saying: "We could have a great parliament there if it wasn't for

There might be just a grain of truth in that one. But I also like the chance encounters with stray politicians at Leinster House in July. There's time for a chat and a coffee; sometimes a pint or two is not entirely out of the question.

Conversation will invariably turn to the North on such occasions as Lambeg Drums pound and the sash-wearers march. This year such talk has added focus as we wait—yet again—for some word from the IRA.

And this time, eight years after the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, there is more than a little weariness amongst all parties at Leinster House with the possible exception of Sinn Fein.

This week Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern held a brief meeting in London. The two leaders meet so often and have discussed the same vexed subject, Northern Ireland, with much intensity over the years



POLITICS with JOHN DOWNING

since they were each elected in the summer of 1997. They hardly need to spend too much time explaining their thoughts to each other by now.

The question is whether their thoughts are now identical or, as with British and Irish positions on EU agriculture and budgetary policy, they add up merely to agreement to disagree.

So far we must conclude that Ahern and Blair are at one. After all they have worked together for over eight years, suffered a succession of dreadful setbacks together,

and each time bravely renewed together the difficult search for a settlement.

But the pressure of events puts a strain on the best relationships. In simple terms the IRA and their Sinn Fein buddies have the capacity to annoy two nations. All mainstream and fully democratic politicians in these islands have waited nearly three months for a statement from the IRA declaring a commitment to operate solely by democratic and peaceful methods.

It was on Wednesday March 6 last that Gerry Adams made a pub-

IRA to fully commit to political action only. Ironically, we're told it's not helpful to talk about the IRA "disbanding" so we have to find other euphemisms which might be acceptable to people who can contemplate and commit the most unspeakable acts.

We have been told since then been told the IRA's 1,500 active "soldiers" are consulting one another. We know not when they will decide to tell us what they have decided. But there is a suggestion in Government circles that something may emerge on or about July 10, so-called "Drumree Sunday".

Meanwhile, many of us will watch the "marching season" with apprehension. In these circumstances it is easy for divisions to arise among the non-IRA/SF elements in this complex process.

For now Dublin and London will stick to the same simple message to Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein and the

shilly-shallying. This time everyone needs a complete and credible end to the campaign of violence.

All strands of opinion, from Ian Paisley to the greenest wing of Fianna Fail, are agreed on this one point. Blair and Ahern have their own flaws and difficulties. But their track record on the North is a tribute to both of them.

It should also be a strong hint to the IRA to reply without further delay. On many occasions they have managed to play both sides of the street and make considerable gains for the movement as a whole.

But those days are definitively gone now. The IRA has only one simple choice: to stand down or not. Clarity at least has finally been achieved. It only remains to be seen whether we can get a conclusion.

John Downing is political correspondent of the Irish Daily Star

The Leader Interview: JP McManus



HE is one of the best known and wealthiest men in the world. And next week, JP McManus will be in the news again when some of the world's top golfers and celebrities play in his charity tournament in Adare. Limerick Leader deputy editor **EUGENE PHELAN** met JP at his home at Martinstown, Kilmallock



JP McManus: his charity golf Pro-Am at Adare Manor Golf Resort next Monday and Tuesday has attracted the cream of world players as well as celebrities and ordinary club golfers

(LL)

The sultan of golf swing tees up world's

up world's top players

FIVE years ago in a tent at Limerick Golf Club, Tiger Woods was asked why, with all his commitments, did he come to play in a golf tournament in Limerick. "It is simple," he replied. "JP. We came here for JP."

World golf stars sought on every continent, including Robert Allenby, Robert Appleby and David Duval, all nodded in agreement.

Of course, it is only partly true. Brilliant organisation, and the fact that they know JP as a friend, is why they came to a tournament in a place they had hardly ever heard of.

This year they are all coming back and bringing some friends as well. Yes, the JP McManus Invitational Pro-Am at Adare Hotel & Golf Resort has made it as a showcase for world class golf.

JP is relaxed, despite the busy build-up to the event, and pushes credit for its success on to others.

"Yeah," he says nonchalantly, "I have played with Tiger, Davis Love, Fred Couples and they are all coming," in a part explanation as to why the stars will be in Adare next week.

This time around, JP has not only lined up Tiger Woods but a plethora of world stars, including Ernie Els and Davis Love III, who will play golf next Monday and Tuesday at Adare Manor Hotel and Golf resort.

So how does he do it?

"Players attract players," is JP's modest answer. "It helps, you just get a knock-on effect, and they come."

JP was brought up in Ballysheedy near Limerick Golf Club. He went to Limerick CBS, Sexton Street, and worked on the construction of his now home at Martinstown as a young man.

While walking around his grounds he joked: "I am sorry I did not do a better job."

He has a sense of humour and a quick retort to questions.

A successful career in gambling, in which he has made millions, has been supplemented by huge success in currency trading.

And while his present home is impressive, it is nothing to the massive mansion which is currently being completed adjacent to his home.

Sitting in one of the expansive

rooms at Martinstown you cannot help but be impressed.

Staff outside in the stables can be heard having a laugh; the helicopter is parked in the corner and security is impressive.

What do we spot in the corner of the room? Paintings. But not any paintings. These are the works of Peter Deighan and they will be auctioned next Tuesday at the Pro-Am Dinner in Adare Manor Hotel. Don't think of bidding; not unless you have a million euro or two to spare.

The original paintings are impressive. One is of Tiger Woods on his own and other includes Tiger and JP's great friend Mark O'Meara. Another painting which will be of great interest is the one entitled Ryder Cup Heroes. It shows Paul McGinley, Darren Clarke and Padraig Harrington after winning the Ryder Cup.

But there will be many more interesting items for auction, including an Aston Martin DB9, a round golf with Jodie Kidd, a signed framed grammy award of the lyrics from U2's Bono and his jacket that he wore that night. Last time at Limerick Golf Club, between the golf and the very successful auction at a celebration dinner, around £15m—almost €20m—was raised for local charities.

I was one of those fortunate to witness the amazing auction after the dinner, conducted in a specially constructed dome at Adare Manor. Everyone was astounded at the money spent at the auction.

A round of golf with Tiger Woods and Mark O'Meara went for £1.4m. A painting of the late golfer, Payne Stewart also sold for £1.4m. A pair of Manchester United tickets fetched £25,000, and a signed soccer ball fetched £25,000. A pair of season tickets for Wimbledon raised £70,000.

The auction made more than £8m. This time round, the betting is that even more will be raised.

SO what does it cost to run the JP Pro-Am? He somewhat side-tracked the question, but he did make the following comment: "What I will say is that it would cost a lot more if I had to pay the 500 volunteers, plus all the others, who come out and help."

So what is the target this time?

"The target is to do as well as we

can. We don't have a figure we want to raise," he says.

"We first ran an Am-Am in 1987 for CAT-Scan equipment in the Limerick Regional. I think it might have been one of the first golf classics, to be honest," he recalls.

"We got great support. There were no great celebrities in those days. Those playing paid a thousand punts a team, which was a lot of money," he says.

In 1990, JP held his first Pro-Am but it was not until 1995 that it really took off.

Lee Westwood, Darren Clarke, Des Smyth, Eamon Darcy, Michael Campbell, Roger Chapman, Paul McGinley and Padraig Harrington have all supported the event.

And this year, an added bonus is that Michael Campbell, who won the US Open in Pinehurst, will all

could not have made this writer feel more welcome.

He won't be playing golf in the Pro-Am.

"I would prefer to meet the people and enjoy it that way," he says.

A total of 8,600 golfers tried to qualify to play with the star golfers such as Tiger, and already, through those qualifiers, £1.3m has been raised.

With crowds of 20,000 each day, some feel it might be too much for these amateurs—that they might let the occasion get to them.

But not JP.

"I think any of those guys who went through the qualifiers will have no problem at all. If they can go through those qualifiers they will be able for it," he says.

It is not just the professional golfers in the line-up who will attract the crowds to Adare.

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be taking part again.

"He is a great supporter of our events," says JP of Campbell.

Asked if it was true that he sponsored the young New Zealand golfer in his early days, JP gave what might be termed a typical JP answer: "I was a fan and was in his corner in those early days," he said without any further elaboration.

JP is not into giving long, convoluted answers. He conducts his interview like a clever poker player—giving little away. However, he is an extremely pleasant and genial host, and

major," said JP.

In addition, 31 players who have represented Europe or the US in the Ryder Cup, will play.

All of the income taken in on the day from the sale of merchandise—whatever it may be, whether an umbrella or other items of golf gear—will go to over 30 nominated charities in the Mid West.

"It all goes in its entirety to the charities," JP stresses.

HORSES, football, golf and gambling are just some of the many fields synonymous with the name JP McManus. But the man is not about to divulge any of the secrets of his success.

When asked about how many horses he has in training, JP has a laugh: "Too many slow ones."

So how many have you in training?

"Too many, that's all I will say," he grins.

And what about flat racing. Why has he never bothered to get involved?

"I can't afford it," he laughs again.

The real reason, he concedes, is his love of jump racing.

So how about the big question—the one that has sparked the interest of even the most impartial observers of soccer? Has he any regrets over the whole Manchester United saga, the saga that has unfolded when he and his friend John Manger sold their 28.7 per cent stake in the football club to US sports tycoon Malcolm Glazer?

"I would, if I'd lost money," he laughs, before turning more serious. "It's all part of life, but it's over now. I won't be getting back in."

You always said that you were in United for an investment?

"I never said much. I was quoted as saying things," he replies.

Are you glad that it is all over now?

A nod and a smile is his only response.

JP is a huge GAA fan. He was at the hurling and football championship games in which Limerick played against

Tipperary and Kerry respectively, and was impressed. He felt that both sides did well.

Luckily for Limerick County Board, their success on the field is not taken into account as far as the €5m he presented to them recently is concerned.

"I was impressed with what they were doing with the Gaelic Grounds and their plans for the future. That was the reason," he explains.

We go onto talk about the £50m he proposed donating to the Government towards a national stadium. "Sure, I was disappointed with the way it went."

So did he feel that he got unfair media criticism afterwards?

"There was a mixed reaction to it," he concedes.

So do the media give him a tough time?

"It is a fairly difficult question, but by and large, the media is fair," he says.

So will he have another golf fundraiser in 2010?

"Even when we did the one in 2000 we said we would wait and see with the lads if we should do another. I think we will wait and reflect after this," he says.

The highlight of meeting JP for me came at the end of our interview. After artist Peter Curling arrived—with a magnificent painting depicting the hundred or more people involved in the golf event, from JP to Eddie Jordan; Padraig Harrington to Terry McCann—I got an invite to meet the great Istabraq.

One of the greatest race horses of all time, the winner of three champion hurdles in a row is fond of visitors. However, as JP pointed out, it's no good arriving empty handed. So it was up to the house to get a few rosy apples.

I put my hand out a little nervously, but there was no need for anxiety—the beautiful animal picked the apple and licked the remains from my hands.

"That to him is like having a nice glass of wine in the evening," JP says.

It was a pleasure to pour for Istabraq.



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