

# EAMONN DARCY HONOURRED BY GOLF WRITERS



● DECLAN BRANIGAN



● MARY McKENNA



● EAMONN DARCY

**EAMONN DARCY**, Ireland's most exciting golfing ambassador since Christy O'Connor first set the tournament trail ablaze, has carried off a new prize—the Irish Golf Writers' Association Award as the top professional in 1976

And Declan Branigan, whose virtual clean sweep of home amateur events matched Darcy's stunning consistency in the pro ranks, has been named the top amateur.

The top female golfer is Mary McKenna, the big-hitter from Donabate. The awards, which are sponsored by Sterling Roncraft, will be presented at a banquet at Milltown golf club on January 10.

There will also be a special award for Distinguished Services. It goes to Miss Violet Haslett, who was the popular and hard-working secretary of the Irish Ladies Golfing Union from 1946 until her retirement last year.

## Sensational

The award for 24-year-old Darcy caps a sensational year in which the Delgany-born golfer, who is professional at Erawash Valley in the English midlands, had official P.G.A. winnings of £25,026.

This made him the top British and Irish golfer in the Order of Merit, although Spanish teenager Severiano Ballesteros topped the pile with £39,503.

It was pure consistency which earned Darcy so many big cheques. He won the Sumrie Better-Ball event in partnership with Christy O'Connor Junior, took the World Under-25 championship and was beaten in a play-off by Neil Coles for the ultra-rich Penfold championship.

He also struck success at home with a thrilling victory over O'Connor senior in the Irish Dunlop tournament at Hermitage. ...

## Impressive

Declan Branigan emerged as Ireland's top amateur with a string of impressive performances, and he is now hot in the running for a place in the Walker Cup team to face America next year.

He started the year by lifting the West of Ireland championship, in which he beat promising newcomer Tom Cleary in the final. Then followed a runners-up spot behind Denis White after an exciting see-saw

last round in the East of Ireland championship.

Branigan, who comes from Drogheda and is a member of Laytown and Bettystown, started as favourite for the Irish Close title at Portrush in August. He justified that by beating surprise packet Denis O'Sullivan in the final.

A measure of Branigan's almost total supremacy of major events is reflected in the Willie Gill Award, which he won with 160 points. Second was Denis O'Sullivan, who collected a mere 65 points.

Mary McKenna, the 27-year-old bank official from North Co. Dublin, has been Ireland's most successful female golfer of the seventies. This year she came within an ace of bringing off her greatest ever success when she just failed to win the British Strokes championship. She finished second to Jenny Lee Smith.

Earlier in the year, in the Irish championship at Rasses Point in May, she again just failed to Claire Nesbitt, who beat her in the final at the 20th despite a fighting comeback by Miss McKenna, who was five down at the ninth.

Mary was runner-up again in partnership with Mary Gorry in the Irish Foursomes championship at the Grange. She struck success as a member of the winning Leinster team in the Interprovincial championships.

## Giles In Hospital

Johnny Giles is out of action for five or six weeks. The Ireland and West Brom player-manager entered hospital yesterday for an operation on a torn leg muscle.

Giles broke down in training on Monday and after consultation with a specialist, it was decided to operate on a muscle behind his right knee.

The injury forced Giles to retire after only 20 minutes of Albion's game with Everton last Saturday week.

The Donabate girl also made her fourth appearance in the Curtis Cup match with America. She is Ireland's most successful competitor in this bi-annual event, having played 16 matches, won seven, halved one and lost eight.



● VIOLET HASLETT