Early morning blues as Walter Woods surveys the sprinklers at the second green as an attempt is made to clear the last of the rime before play begins.

Hosting a big event is never easy and the problems multiply as the weather gets colder. Head greenkeepers Gordon Moir and Eddie Adams report from St Andrews.

A n annual event on the PGA European Tour circuit is the Alfred Dunhill Cup at St Andrews which has been held at the ‘Home of Golf’ since its inception in 1985.

Staging such a prestigious event in Scotland in October is never easy. Normally most greenkeepers are busy making preparations to begin their winter programmes following a season’s play with numerous competitions. On the Old Course, after tens of thousands of local and visiting golfers, everything is beginning to look a little tired so when you have professional golfers and a televised tournament, the problems of maintenance and presentation become even harder.

For this particular event, the vagaries of the Scottish weather plagued the greenstaff more than ever before.

Preparation of The Old Course is an ongoing job, and with golfers travelling from all over the world to play the famous links, local club competitions and companies sponsoring national, Scottish and regional events, the presentation and condition has always to be first class. In preparation for the Dunhill, very little extra is carried out other than extra cutting on the days immediately preceding and during the tournament, with the greens being topdressed with a sand/sterilised mixture at the end of September to help smooth and speed up the surface.

One week prior to the event, torrential rain fell from the Wednesday until the Saturday with 35mm on the Thursday alone (October’s total average rainfall!) which severely hampered the preparation work. After two days of dry weather, however, the staff were able to get back to normal.

The first serious headache took place on the Monday morning preceding the event when the greens staff went out to prepare the course for the first day’s play and discovered that one of The Old Course’s three large bunkers, Shell Bunker, had partly collapsed. “The wet weather had undermined the foundation of the reverted face,” explained Eddie Adams, head greenkeeper of the Old, “Resulting in the top sinking three to four feet in the very centre [the face of Shell Bunker measured 15 feet high by 90 feet long]. At such short notice, and with all the other work to attend to, all we could do was bank up the base at the affected area with sand to prevent any further collapse.

Fortunately, although Shell is a huge bunker guarding both the 7th and 11th greens it doesn’t really come into play for the professionals, but it was disappointing from the presentation point of view.

“Ironically we were due to start rebuilding Shell at the beginning of November in preparation for the 1995 Open.”

With frosts forecast for every morning of the tournament, Walter Woods, Links Supervisor and Eddie Adams decided to cut all the greens, tees and aprons after play as well as in the mornings just in case the morning frosts prevented any cutting at that time of day.

Wednesday arrived, the day of
'The weather caused such disruption that after a day’s work the staff were back in the afternoons until after 6pm.'