Who will be on cloud nine after this year's Open? Picture by Brian Morgan
Jimmy MacDonald has seen it all before and he knows you do that little bit more when The Open pays a visit.

The Open Championship, the pinnacle of the golfing year, is just six weeks away and the Head Greenkeeper of Royal Lytham and St Annes is in his office looking as relaxed as one would if it were the Club Championship that was just over the horizon.

Jimmy MacDonald is that type of character. Nothing much fazes him. Well why should it? He's already been Head Greenkeeper at three Opens and four Senior Opens, been Deputy at another Open, and also has a Ryder Cup and a Curtis Cup under his belt. He also coped with what would be many greenkeepers biggest nightmare during an Open.

"I'd led to believe that I'm the only living greenkeeper to have had both the Ryder Cup and The Open Championship."

For all that his Championship CV is unvaried Jimmy had one regret.

"I've loved the Walker Cup. It would have completed the set for me and I'm sure we would've done well here because, other than amateur Bobby Jones, no American has ever won The Open at Lytham."

At 62 this will be Jimmy's final Open. "I feel I've just walked off the 17th and I haven't had many double bogeys but I haven't had many birdies either - I reckon I'm about level par," is his modest assessment of a career which commanded attention in the run up to an Open is the fertiliser programme.

"I never want to overfeed although I know people would be tempted because of the weather situations but in the main we don't do anything differently to a normal year."

"We've had Fusarium on the odd green but I would've done a little bit differently. I can remember the old man who taught me it the same way. The little turf and you watch as he pulls the top of it - you still build them with the same tools."

One area to which Jimmy pays particular attention in the run up to an Open is the vertidraining through the winter. I try to keep it simple and not be tempted to feed too early. Unfortunately I have the Lytham Trophy in May which is a big amateur event and I was tempted to cut a bit closer but I had to resist.

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"We just maybe spent a little more time on the greens and mowing standards may have something to do with it - just a little thing. I can remember the old man who taught me it the same way. The little turf and you watch as he pulls the top of it - you still build them with the same tools."

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Preparing tees fit for a Queen

Ah rain! This brings me to the situation at the last Lytham Open in 1989 which would have had many lesser men reaching for the strait jacket and voluntarily admitting themselves to the padded cell.

The Saturday of the '89 Open was completely washed out and Royal Lytham became the only venue to have had the final day of the Championship played on a Monday.

"In the end we made more friends than enemies by getting it right," recalled Jimmy.

"I just couldn't believe what I was seeing. I'd never seen anything like it before or since."

After a full day's torrential rain Jimmy and his Green's Chairman left the course at half past midnight.

"We left some pumps running and at that stage we weren't winning. It was stalemate. I went home and dozed in my chair and when I got back to the course at half past four what I saw was unbelievable - 80% of the water had gone. It must have stopped raining while I'd been dozing and while I was away the water must have penetrated the crust on top of the ground because the drains were empty."

Pressure was put on to start as soon as possible but Jimmy resisted and play resumed at 11am in threeballs.

"There wasn't a pool on the course. I felt the course that year was as good as I've ever had it and if it hadn't rained and the sun had shone the greens would have been as good as I could possibly have wanted them. I've got video of all the Opens I've been involved in and watching the film of '89 the puts were rolling as truly as they could possibly go."

It says much for the condition of the golf course that year that it will always be remembered for the brilliance of Seve and his wonderful chip on the final hole to seal it against Nick Price.

"Wouldn't it be nice for Seve to win it at Lytham for a third time," said Jimmy, who is the proud owner of the flag from the 18th signed by Seve as well as a flag signed by both teams from the '61 Ryder Cup.

As in previous years Jimmy will be assisted during the week of the Championship by his excellent team of eight - one more than last time - and his "Old Boys" - Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers at neighbouring courses who all worked under Jimmy either at Lytham or at Formby where he was Head Greenkeeper before returning to Lytham.

Chris and Geoff Whittle, from Royal Birkdale and St Annes Old Links respectively, Peter Simpson, from Fairhaven and Mark Broughton, from Morecombe, and possibly his son Derek from Formby supplement the existing team for the week and their local knowledge and general experience means Jimmy is happy to have them cut greens for him.

"It's always interesting during an Open. You get pressure and you find things go wrong but you think about them and draw on your experience. If conditions are right I know that I've got the staff and machinery go out and present a very respectable course. I think very highly of my staff they've all been to college and all have a great deal of experience and have been with me for a great many years. In fact excluding Andrew the apprentice we average 20 year's greenkeeping each and we have a total of 165 years between us."

To emphasis the fact Jimmy asks if I would mind if he listed the names of his team rather than give an equipment inventory. "They are far more important to me than machines."