What a week

Peter Holmstrom has always dreamed of helping Europe win the Ryder Cup. Ideally this would be during a tournament played in front of a packed home crowd in Wales. It just so happens that some dreams do come true. Peter picks up the story...

“I have been working with Jim McKenzie, the Course Manager at Celtic Manor for over four years through my role as a specialist team of greenkeepers was allocated specific roles, including cutting trees, bunker care, replacing divots, course maintenance and assisting with cutting greens and fairways when required. It’s not only the course itself that needs attention, but the putting and chipping green practice areas and VIP enclosures.

The team was divided into four groups to form on the greens, I joined up with three other greenkeepers to remove water from various putting greens.

On Thursday, walking from the 8th to the 9th tee, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. I was brave enough to ask Tiger Woods for his autograph, I did not oblige. I have his signature on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from my way.

After lunch we were allocated the job of placing wood chip bark bags onto the course for players and spectators to get easier access around the wetter areas of the golf club. In convoy we headed out in club cars loaded with chip.

I stopped to watch the opening ceremony, including the raising of the flags, introduction of the players, all accompanied by Katharine Jenkins singing.

Following this we headed out back until it got dark, completing a 15 hour shift. Exhausted, I arrived back at the yard to see a total of 29 tonnes of wood chip being delivered!

Mon 27 – Thu 30 Sep

Each day we would start work before Sam, arriving at the greenkeeping service compound to be greeted by Jim McKenzie and to be given our respective jobs. We would work until lunchtime, and then following some free time, do our jobs for the afternoon. 12 -15 hour days were not unusual.

I was delegated the task of being in the special maintenance group for the week which means that I support the fairway cutting crew, possibly raking bunkers during the matches and any other special maintenance to be carried out on the course.

During my allocated time off, I was lucky enough to meet some golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a driver during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, “Can you use it?” he asked, to which I said, “No, it’s too stiff.”

“That’s why I gave it to you in the first place,” he replied.

On the Wednesday the rain came, 15mm fell in four hours. With both teams out on the course practicing the rain came down heavier and puddles were starting to form on the greens, I jumped up with three other greenkeepers to remove water from various putting greens.

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Fri 1 Oct - day one of the Ryder Cup

My day began again at 5am. 45,000 spectators were on their way, heading to what would be a trying and testing day for everyone concerned.

The rain was pouring down, so a few of us had jobs. I was sat and wait for my call. The matches started on time and the rain was getting harder. The shout came and I ran up the hill to the 1st green to push the water off.

Peter was invited to return to the resort 15 years later as part of a specialist team of greenkeepers was a huge honour, plus I am a massive Ryder Cup fan!

The Support Team was divided into teams comprising of five members, and each member was allocated specific roles, including

Ryder Cup experiences

As this was the final day, everything was to be cut and presented perfectly, and despite the rainfall of the last five days, the course was immaculate.

With our work finally completed we were able to go out and watch as Europe reclaimed the Ryder Cup by a single point. We watched as the players celebrated with countless thousands of fans. As a team, we walked down the 17th fairway, crossed the bridge to the 18th green where we gathered to make our way to the closing ceremony and trophy presentation. As we walked toward the ceremonies the fans recognised who we were and a chip quickly turned into a huge standing ovation.

I have never been so proud in my life. As a team, we were getting the recognition that was rightly deserved for our unbelievable achievements in making this Ryder Cup possible, for our part in the success of the European team and for raising the profile of greenkeepers and turf professionals worldwide.

The tournament where a small team of skilled greenkeepers became one of the most Cup play groups of people within the golfing world.

Mon Oct 4 - The final day

Rain was pouring hard and all the talk was about how the course had never been flooded - wouldn’t this be the first Ryder Cup to be called off?

Overnight Europe were leading in all six matches but if play did not start by 18.43 all matches would be deemed a half and Europe would go down knowing we had done our best.

The weather took hold and at 10.00 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and bunkers, punching water out of the bunkers and raking up all the washed down sand. (That evening I saw myself on TV as a bunker on the 18th fairway on the report.)

All our hard work and effort were absolutely shattered by the end but somehow we managed to get play started by 1200pm - a day that would go on to be remembered as Europe’s finest day!
What a week

Peter Holmstrom has always dreamed of helping Europe win the Ryder Cup. Ideally this would be during a tournament played in front of a packed home crowd in Wales. It just so happens that some dreams do come true. Peter picks up the story...

“I have been working with Jim McKenzie, the Course Manager at Celtic Manor for over four years through my role as a Technical Sales Regional Manager with Countrywide. As such, Jim invited me to join the 70 strong greenkeeping Support Team for the duration of the Ryder Cup. I knew it would be a special occasion and a high point in my career, but I didn’t anticipate just how special the event would be, for the players, the staff, the spectators and for Wales itself.”

Peter is a proud Welshman, Newport born and bred, and whose links with Celtic Manor go back many years. I was so lucky to return the resort anyway. I remember when construction at Celtic Manor first started, as a teenager I watched as the resort grew from a concept into a dream. I remember when construction took place, when I would work with Jim McKenzie in the greenkeeping service department to look after the putting green practice area and VIP enclosures.

The team was due to work from Monday, September 27th, through to Friday October 1st, following some free time, to our respective jobs. We would work around the clock to ensure the Ryder Cup was a memorable experience for the players and spectators.

During my allocated time off, I was lucky enough to watch some golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a lift during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, “Can you use it?” he asked, to which I said, “No, it’s too stiff.”

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On Thursday, walking from the 8th to the 9th tee, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. Would I be brave enough to ask Tiger Woods for his autograph, I didn’t and I obliged. I have his signature on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from Tiger on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from Tiger.

After lunch we were allocated the job of playing wood chip bark bags for the players and spectators. We stopped to watch the Opening Ceremony, including the raising of the flag, introduction of the players, all accompanied by Katherine Jenkins singing. Following this we headed out into the course straight away, it got dark, completing a 15 hour shift. Exhausted, I arrived back at the yard to see my card, and a beaming smile from Tiger on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from Tiger.

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Also to the crowd who stayed throughout the day and kept us well motivated, encouraging us every time we cleared a green, a bunker or a fairway by giving us the loudest cheers, and to the gang of American Vikings who sang to us all on the 6th fairway.

Sun 3 Oct – European golf’s finest day

Rain was pouring hard again and all the talk was about how the course had never been this flooded - would it be a late Ryder Cup and for raising the profile of greenkeepers worldwide.

The weather took a turn for the worse and at 10.30 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and fairways, pumping water out of the bunkers and pushing water off the greens and fairways - it was hard work. Finally, seven and a half hours later, play resumed.

It took us until nearly 7.30 to clear the rest of the course. It was a huge effort and I cannot believe, after seeing the pictures on the TV, what an achievement it was. We had a final briefing from Jim McKenzie. He was fresh from the Media Centre where an American journalist had commented that no other greenkeeping team in the world could have achieved what we had.

I hope to mention my colleagues for together working so hard to pull off that miracle.

A special mention to the people who stayed throughout the day and kept us well motivated, encouraging us every time we cleared a green, a bunker or a fairway by giving us the loudest cheers, and to the gang of American Vikings who sang to us all on the 6th fairway.

Mon 27 – Thur 30 Sep

Each day we would start work before Sam, arriving at the greenkeeping service compound to be greeted by Jim McKenzie and to be given our respective jobs. We would work until lunchtime, and then following some free time, do our jobs for the afternoon. 12 – 15 hour days were not unusual.

I was delegated the task of being in the special maintenance group for the week which means that I support the fairway cutting crew, putting crew, fairway maintenance group for the week, and putting and chip-bunker maintenance group for the week, which has limited irrigation, I have worked with Celtic Manor in the build up to the event by supplying them with a maximum moisture retention material through a 4mm screened peat and sand mixture dressed into the grass sward. Although we knew how disruptive the weather might be, we worked until the rain was getting harder. The shout came from my colleague, and I ran from our sheds to the 1st green to push the water off.

Peter was asked by Countrywide to go to: www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk to read Peter’s blog on full colour pages, including our high-impact advertising.

With our work finally completed we were able to go out and watch as Europe claimed the Ryder Cup by a single point. We watched as the players celebrated with countless thousands of fans. As a team, we walked down the 17th fairway, crossed the bridge to the 18th green where we gathered to make our way to the closing ceremony and trophy presentation. As we walked toward the ceremony the fans recognised who we were and a chip gradually turned into a huge sitting ovation. I have never been so proud in my life. As a team, we were getting the recognition that was rightly deserved for our unbelievable achievements in making this Ryder Cup unforgettable, for our part in the success of the European team and for raising the profile of greenkeepers around the world.

As this was the final day, everything was to be cut and presented perfectly, and despite the rainfall of the last five days, the course was immaculate.

Non Oct 4 – The final day

“This is the one day where every tee, green, bunker and fairway is prepared for the final day.”

As a team we were given the task of preparing the course for the final day, the course itself on the 1st fairway was heavily and puddles were starting to form.

We got there just in time to see Ian Poulter and Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a lift during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, “Can you use it?” he asked, to which I said, “No, it’s too stiff.”

“That’s why I gave it to you in the first place,” he replied.

With both teams out on the course throughout the day and kept us well motivated, encouraging us every time we cleared a green, a bunker or a fairway by giving us the loudest cheers, and to the gang of American Vikings who sang to us all on the 6th fairway.

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