Matt’s Personal Thanks

There are of course people who I feel deserve a special mention as they have made a huge contribu-
tion to my life and the running and organisation of the Toro student greenkeeper award, in no particular order they are: Pete Mannfield and Christine Waterhill, at Lely UK
Sami Collins, Rachael Duffy, Scott MacCallum, Jim Croston, Andrea Millen, Chris Speakley, Archie Dunn and Gary Cunningham, at BIGGA
Bruce Jameson, B Jamieson Golf Advisors Ltd; Andrew Strauntry, Horsham Golf Club; Robby McMillan, Tytten Wood Golf Club; Amy Ellingham, One Agency/Leysham Golf Club; all of the hard working staff at Ham Manor Golf Club in West Sussex; David Black, John O Gaunt Golf Club; all Plumpton College; Hugh Murray, Connington Centre for Land Based Studies; Mick Brand, Bournemouth College; Richard Bevan and his family who work at Weston Garden Machines in Somerset, all of my family and friends who have supported me throughout my life and during the award process.

And last but not least my parents Jean and Trevor Perks. All of the national finalists, for Land Based Studies; Mick Blackmur, Evesham College; for Land Based Studies; Mick Blackmur, Evesham College; all Plumpton College; Hugh Murray, Connington Centre for Land Based Studies; Mick Brand, Bournemouth College; Richard Bevan and his family who work at Weston Garden Machines in Somerset, all of my family and friends who have supported me throughout my life and during the award process.

Perks of the Job

When the name “Matthew Perks” was announced as winner of the 2011 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition, the owner of that name felt a mixture of shock and elation and “pretty much every emotion going”.

One thing it wasn’t, however, was a complete bolt from the blue as Matt, Greenkeeper/Mechanician at Ham Manor Golf Club, in West Sussex, had been working towards just that goal for over two years.

He had been well aware of the Toro Competition for some time as his current Course Manager, Alan Pierce MG, was the 2005 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year, an achievement which assisted his own rise from an assistant to the position of Course Manager three years ago.

“I spoke to Alan about doing my Level 2 in Sports Turf two years ago and he was very positive, although I had to wait until one of the other guys had finished his Level 3 first, as we couldn’t afford to have two staff members off at the same time,” explained Matt, as we spoke the morning after the Toro final.

“I was eager to get going when I did get to Plumpton College and felt that if I gave everything over the winter months, and did really well, there was a chance I could get nominated by the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.”

And with that goal firmly in place that’s exactly what he did.

“I was working three and four hours every single day to answer the questions set by the Tutor and was always keen to produce the best piece of work I possibly could.”

In this life there are certain people for whom it is very difficult not to feel a tinge of sympathy and one of those must be the poor student who was next in line after Matt when it came to handing over course work.

“It is normal to fill one of the big portfolios with work during the course. I produced two. The reason being that I always knew that I wanted to be a Course Manager and that then I’d be responsible for bringing through other students, so my thinking was that if I could produced the best portfolio of work I could while on the course it would be a great reference docu-

ment or learning tool for them to look through, said Matt, who also completed the course two months early.

“So I suppose I was already thinking five years into the future. I always have a plan otherwise things just don’t happen. You’ve got to make them happen, haven’t you?”

Matt’s rare combination of inspi-
ration and perspiration reaped dividends and he became the col-
lege’s Joint Student of the Year with Abbie Holliday, of West Sussex Golf Club, and was duly nominated to represent the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

The Regional interview before Past BIGGA Chairman, Billy McMillan; Larry Pearman, of Toro Dealer, John Shaw Machinery, and BIGGA’s Head of Learning and Development, Sami Collins flew in with Matt anxiously awaited the verdict.

It speaks volumes for how much it meant to the 28 year-old that he postponed a visit to his parents by a day, just to wait for the post to arrive with what turned out to be a BIGGA franked letter containing very good news.

“I went back through every single piece of college work I’d done to make sure I was prepared to answer anything, whether it be on trees, health and safety or any element of the job. Much of it was already automatic as I was doing it all the time at work, but there were other topics, in areas in which I didn’t have regular involvement, and I wanted to refresh my knowledge and understanding of them.”

The overriding feeling for Matt once he got to Altwick Manor was one of ensuring that he didn’t let himself down.

“If I studied as hard as I could beforehand, did well in the interview and produced the best (finalists’ assignment) report that I could, but didn’t win I would have still slept well happy that I had done myself justice. The worst thing would have been to not have performed as well as I could and let myself down, especially when you know what winning this Award can do for you,” he explained.

Matt was born and bred in the Somerset village of Sandford, near Weston-Super-Mare, strong

Matt Perks

Matt Perks is a man who plans to succeed and, as Scott MacCallum found out, it paid off at the final of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Final.
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There are of course people who I feel deserve a special mention as they have made a huge contribution to my life and the training and organisation of the Toro student greenkeeper award, in no particular order they are: Peter Manfield and Christine Watson, at Lety UK; Sami Collins, Rachael Duffy, Scott MacCallum, Jim Croston, Andrew Millen, Chris Sealey, Archie Dunn and Gary Cunningham, at BIGGA’s Head of Learning and Development, Sami Collins flew in from Norway, all of my family and friends who have supported me throughout my life and during the award process.

My parents, Jean and Trevor Perks.

And last but not least my fiancé Lauren and Trent Perks, hopefully today has repaid them for the years of grief and monetary hardship that I put them for the years of grief and monetary hardship that I put.

And with that goal firmly in place, that’s exactly what I did.

‘I was working there and four hours every single day to answer the questions set by the Tutor and I was always keen to produce the best piece of work I possibly could.’

In this life there are certain people for whom it is very difficult not to feel a tinge of sympathy and one of those must be the poor student who was next in line after Matt when it came to handing over course work.

It is normal to fill one of the big portfolios with work during the course, I produced two. The reasoning being that I always knew that I wanted to be a Course Manager and that then I’d be responsible for bringing through other students, so my thinking was that if I could produced the best portfolio of work I could while on the course it would be a great reference document or learning tool for them to look through, said Matt, who also completed the course two months early.

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“It was easier to get going when I did get to Plumpton College and felt that if I gave it everything over the winter months, and did really well, there was a chance I could get nominated by the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.”

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Matt’s rare combination of inspiration and perspiration reaped dividends and he became the college’s Joint Student of the Year with Abbie Holland, of West Sussex Golf Club, and was duly nominated to represent the College for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

The overriding feeling for Matt once he got to Aldwark Manor was one of ensuring that he didn’t let himself down.

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Matt was born and bred in the Somerset village of Sandford, near Weston-Super-Mare, strong
Matt has had the opportunity to chat with last year’s Toro winner, Andrew Stanger (above left) about what to expect when in the States.

The two runners-up were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale Golf Club and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor, comprised a 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Blair Somerville, of Helensburgh Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor, comprised a 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Blair Somerville, of Helensburgh Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor. The two runners-up were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale Golf Club and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor, comprised a 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Blair Somerville, of Helensburgh Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor. The two runners-up were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale Golf Club and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor.

The other five finalists were Justin Howard, of Cranham Golf Centre and Myrescough College; Edin Sonneveld, of Holmwood Golf Club and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Ian Wallace, of Burgham Golf Club and Myrescough College and Benjamin Hunter, of Garon Park Golf Complex and Myerscough College.

The Final, which took place at BIGGA Headquarters at Aldwark Manor comprised an 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely UK; Bruce Jamieson, a respected golf course consultant; Chris Scally, a BIGGA Director, and Sami Collins, BIGGA’s Head of Learning and Development. The finalists were also presented with an assignment on the morning of the final and had to produce a report based on the Anwalt Masters golf course rules. Following the results everyone changed went for a meal in York before rounding the day off with some high quality tenpin bowling. The two runners-up were Robert Mills, of Sunningdale Golf Club and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor, comprised a 45 minute interview before Pete Mansfield, of Lely and GOSTA; Rhys Williams, of Royal Porthcawl Golf Club and Pencoed College; Blair Somerville, of Helensburgh Golf Club and Merrist Wood College and Miles Todd, Deputy Course Manager of Witham Manor.

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Matt's experience, of mechanic first and greenkeeper second, is not as common as the reverse but he does see significant benefits.

"Irrigation is straightforward to me because it is just a simple hydraulic system buried in the ground and I am used to dealing with much more complicated hydraulic repairs on mowers.

"I believe I need knowledge of both areas if I'm going to be a Course Manager. If it's a small club then I'll need to do the work myself or train someone else and if it's a bigger club, which employs a mechanic, it is important to know that he is doing the job properly."

One of his greatest experiences has been to be one of the volunteers mechanics at last year's Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor.

"I was one of nine volunteers who joined Equipment Manager Cal Callady and overall team of 13 working to keep the machines going in horridly wet conditions.

"We were out on the golf course with bunker pumps to keep them going when they became blocked with gravel rather than have them brought back to the Sheds. The experience will stay with me for the rest of my life."

His time working with Cal may also have had more longstanding benefits to Matt as, following Cal's nomination he has recently become a Director of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association.

He is also looking forward to his trip to the United States, a place he hasn't visited before and one he's been bitten by the greenkeeping bug you'll never go back.

A year and a half later he saw a job for Greenkeeper/Mechanic at Ham Manor Golf Club advertised in Greenkeeper International.

Matt applied, but anticipated a strong field for what is a fine golf course in a very good part of the world. However he impressed at the interview and was offered the job.

"I was offered the job at the interview and thought about it for all of 10 minutes before accepting," he smiled.

When he started he was nervous 60% mechanicing and 40% greenkeep-ing but since then, and he has again put his procedures in place and got the workshop to how he wanted it, it has turned to 70% greenkeeping and 30% mechanicing.

Matt has had the opportunity to chat with last year's Toro winner, Andrew Stanger (above left) about what to expect when in the States.