Open all hours

The BIGGA Open Support Team 2012 worked tirelessly from dusk until dawn at a rain-soaked Royal Lytham & St Annes GC in July. Here are the snapshots and memories from another joyous occasion, writes Steve Castle.

Thirty minutes after Ernie Els remarkably captured the most coveted prize in golf, a large matching red polo-shirted group attracted bemused glances as they posed for photographs on the 18th fairway close to the spot where Adam Scott’s dreams finally crumbled.

The BIGGA Open Support Team 2012 wereed by a challenging week knew they had played an important part in the success of the event whilst many lasting friendships had been cemented.

As The 141st Open ended, the exhausted but happy group reflected on their vital role in preparing the bunkers each morning – a mammoth task as the famous old links boasts over 200 traps, match raking, divoting and attending to the practice areas. As the week progressed and the weather finally improved they were able to enjoy the sight of the sun rising across the course during one of their regular 5am starts, something they will treasure for the rest of their days.

The home greenkeeping team led superbly by Paul Smith consisted of his own regular crew of twelve, a further twenty or so local volunteers, four John Deere staff and six more provided by the R&A from other Open Championship venues fully embraced the BIGGA team, including greenkeepers from across the UK and as far afield as Australia and America.

The advance BIGGA team assembled on the Monday to begin bunker preparation from Tuesday onwards. The remainder were all present and correct in time for the traditional Wednesday afternoon start and their first sight of the glories linked during the R&A Briefing by Grant Moir, Director of Rules.

The course was already damp from early morning support team six times – 1230

Bunkers on course – 205

Prepared by BIGGA early morning support team six times – 1230

Repaired each day by BIGGA Support Team – 6

1987-2012

Celebrating 25

years of BIGGA

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The walkways between holes were at times reminiscent of a particularly damp Glastonbury, and the incredibly high water table meant that some of the bunkers retained standing water despite everyone’s best efforts, illustrating quite how much rain had fallen. But there was not a murmur of complaint from the players, showing what a professional job had been done.

They then trod the same meticulously prepared fairways as Tiger Woods, Tom Watson and Rory McIlroy, springing into action when a hook or slice found the sand. Incredibly, play began on time whilst many lasting friendships had been cemented.

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Open Support Team Statistics

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<th>Year</th>
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A BIG thanks to the BIGGA brigade

The Open Championship was a fine example of teamwork across the board. It was nothing but praise for the effort and support of all who were involved in the running of the course, from the playing to the playing with cups at bunker conditions. The BIGGA support team did a sterling job of preparing the bunkers each morning, which was a difficult task under the circumstances.

The course that the spectators and competitors were met with on the Friday morning was not the course that the Home and BIGGA team faced. Several intensive bands of rain fell early Friday morning, which had not been forecast. It felt as if the weather gods had conspired against us.

Our spirits had truly been dampened and although feeling numb, the whole team rallied with pumps, pipes, generators and squeegees to clear the course and tented village of standing water.

Despite the weather, the course stood up extremely well, and efforts to drain the course continued over the weekend as conditions and when weather permitted.

I hope that things will be less complicated at Muirfield next year.

Grant Moir, R&A

To the team

Thank you for everything that you did to assist at Royal Lytham & St Annes.

It was not an easy week, and it was reassuring to know that we had the support of the BIGGA team, and great that I could make an emergency call at 4am and get an immediate response!

The team did a great job in the circumstances, in very difficult conditions and when weather permitted.

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BIGGA Open Support Team 2012


Second Row: Jason Brooks, Graham Blum, Geoffrey Beascham, Matthew Hutchinson, Ben Scrivener, Robert Hill, Andrew Stirling, Rob, Bruce Hicks, Tom Woods, Tony Smith, Chris Beasley, (Kneeling Down) - Billy Merrit, John Wells MG, Steve Mason, Douglas McIntosh, Mark Brooks, Robert Sandilands, Brian Hunter, Scott Thompson, Richard Jenkins, Steve Cattle, Sean Sullivan, John Geddes, Jim Crotton.

Front Row: Andrew Unwin, Kevan Glass, Paul Young, Miles Todd, Mark Fry, Bev Blair, Miles Wood, Richard Duffy, Tracey Maddison, Sandra Raper, Phillip Graham.

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The Open Championship was a fine example of team work across the board. It was nothing but praise for the open support of staff at Royal Lytham & St Annes in the morning when faced with dealing with early winter bunkers. The BIGGA support team did a sterling job of preparing the bunkers each morning, which was a difficult task under the circumstances.

The course that the spectators and competitors were met with on the Friday morning, was not the same course that the Home and BIGGA team faced. Several intensive bands of heavy showers fell early Friday morning, which had not been forecast. It felt as if the weather gods had conspired against us.

Our spirits had truly been dampened and although feeling numb, the whole team rallied with pumps, pipes, generators and squeegees to clear the course and tented village of standing water.

Despite the weather the course stood up extremely well, and staged to show its true character under difficult conditions. My thanks go to all those volunteers who assisted the Club and BIGGA in preparing the course under difficult conditions. A job well done by all the team!

Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper, Royal Lytham & St Annes GC

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Thank you for everything that you did to assist at Royal Lytham & St Annes.

It will be an easy week, and it will be reassuring to know that we had the back-up of the BIGGA team, and great that I could make an emergency call at 4am and get an immediate response!

The team did a great job in the mornings in very difficult circumstances with, firstly, wet bunkers and then wettish bunkers drying out.

I hope things will be less complicated at Muirfield next year.

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Steve Mason, from Stocks Golf Club, knew he was in for a busy opening morning when his three players all found separate bunkers with their opening tee shots on the notorious par three first – and he went on to rake 17 in total, the highest of the day.

He said: "You have to be on your toes, and I knew it would be a long day from the first three shots. But that’s what we’re there for, and it was an honour not only to walk alongside the players but also to work on The Open course."

Some enjoyed unexpected surprises, like Miles Todd from Rhuddlan Golf Club. He was expecting a quiet final day when he joined Andres Romero and Chad Campbell’s early morning pairing – so imagine his amazement when footballer Carlos Tevez suddenly appeared as caddie for his compatriot.

Miles said: “I thought it looked like him and I went up and had a little chat with him. He was a really nice bloke and loves his golf.

“From very few spectators at the start, word quickly got round and it had become a circus by the back nine. People were calling out to him and there were photographers running around everywhere, numbers swelling after every hole.

“I’m not sure Chad Campbell was too happy about it. Tevez kept standing behind him as he played and at one point Romero had to stop Tevez from slamming a club into the bag as Campbell was taking a shot!”

Paul Griffiths of Seaford Golf Club added: “It’s been an amazing experience. It’s my first Open and it’s been out of this world. People would pay thousands to experience this.

“It’s really hard work and everyone finishes the week absolutely shattered. But I enjoyed it so much. I might tell the lads at the club it was rubbish then I’ll get to go next year too!”

John Kernaghan from Chipping Sodbury Golf Club was given the honour of accompanying odds-on favourite Adam Scott up and down the fairways on the final day, and nailed the final bunker of the tournament on the 18th where the luckless Aussie allowed the Claret Jug to slip from his grasp.

The tournament ended with Paul Smith personally thanking the team for their terrific efforts, a sentiment that was echoed by Chief Executive Jim Croxton.

See you at Muirfield 2013!

Maddison and Learning and Development Executive, Rachael Duffy holding the fort admirably.

The first day of play saw the ceremonial passing of the BIGGA baton from outgoing Chairman Andrew Mellon to new Chairman Tony Smith.

Andrew, who is departing to become General Manager of Hydro turf in Qatar, handed the badge to previous vice-chairman Tony in the BIGGA marquee.

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