Back in time

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Special

Back in time looks back at cuttings of greenkeeping news from days gone-by. 2012 is a landmark year, being the centenary of Greenkeeping Associations, as well as 25 years since BIGGA was formed.

This month, in another Special Feature, we take a look back at over two decades of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award – and speak to one of the very first winners who explains how his victory gave his fledgling career a huge boost.

1989 saw the opening broadcast from little-known satellite TV station Sky, the Church of England vote to allow female ministers to be ordained and Nick Faldo be ordained and Nick Faldo becomes the first ever English winner of the Masters.

The last year of the eighties also saw the first winner crowned of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year, a delighted Mark Proctor.

The accompanying piece in the November edition of Greenkeeping Management – as this magazine was then known – described how Mark’s world would partake in the Winter School for Turf Grass Managers at the University of Massachusetts.

The article added that Mark, was looking forward to his first plane journey, and also tucking into an American ‘whopper’!

Mark Proctor is chosen as T O R O ’ S Young Greenkeeper of the Year, a blessing for Beverley’s education programme.

1992 winner Barry Rhodes was pictured on the front cover with the winner’s shield – and the first winner this century was Jonathan Cleland, now Course Manager at Elderslie Golf Club.

Celebrating in 2005 was Alan Pierce – who is now a Master Greenkeeper – and in 2007 the victor was Avon Bridges.

Above all, the long-term success of many of the winners proves that all the finalists have a bright future in greenkeeping.

DAVID NORTON’S STORY

Just three years after winning the 1990 Student Greenkeeper of the Year title, David Norton (main right) was Head Greenkeeper at The Belfry.

This graphically demonstrates the impact the competition can have on a fledgling career.

He was a 21-year-old assistant greenkeeper at Beverley & East Riding Golf Club when he clinched the title, and the following January he headed to the Winter School for Turfgrass Managers course at the University of Massachusetts.

Over two decades on David can still recall the details of the “fantastic” trip stateside – and describes how it played a huge role in both his personal and professional development.

He said: “Very I was flattered to be nominated, then on the day of the final I made sure I was honest. I think it’s tempting to say what you think the interviewers want to hear, but I didn’t do that. I tried to give logical answers.

“I was delighted to win it, and the trip to America was fantastic in every way. The educational side was terrible, and the social side too. I was only 21, it was my first trip to America, and I learnt so much. It stood me in good stead professionally and personally. It genuinely helped me develop as a young adult.

“Also, giving my career a big boost. I was offered a job at Mid Yorkshire Golf Club when he clinched the title, and the following January he headed to the Winter School for Turfgrass Managers course at the University of Massachusetts.

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The article added that Mark was "too. I was only 21, it was my first trip to America, and I learnt so much. It was terrific, and the social side increases your appreciation of courses.

“Being able to see things logically and a greenkeeper’s perspective is vital. So play golf! It doesn’t matter whether you’re good or bad, it increases your appreciation of courses. "Look at as many different courses as possible and think about what’s good and what’s bad. That ensures you can avoid the bad and try and implement the good on your course. You also have to remember every golf course is different – what works on one may not work on another.

The biggest thing is don’t be afraid to ask questions. Get as much knowledge as you can and use this to your advantage.”

David has plenty of sound advice from both a golfer’s perspective and a greenkeeper’s perspective is vital. So play golf! It doesn’t matter whether you’re good or bad, it increases your appreciation of courses.

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He said: “Firstly I was flattered to be nominated, then on the day of the 1990 final made sure I was honest. I think it’s tempting to say what you think the interviewers want to hear, but I didn’t do that. I tried to give logical answers.

“I was delighted to win it, and the trip to America was fantastic in every way. The educational side was superb, the social side was too. I was only 21, it was my first trip to America, and I learnt so much. It stood me in good stead professionally and personally. It genuinely helped me develop as a young adult.

“Raising my career a big boost. I was offered a job at Mid Yorkshire Golf Club in Pontefract off the back of it, which I accepted, and I then applied for a job at Gleneagles.

“Technically, I didn’t have enough years of experience to go for that job but they considered me because they saw I had Student Greenkeeper of the Year on my CV. They had around 250 applicants and I got down to the last two but just lost out.

“However, getting that close to a job at such a prestigious course helped my confidence massively and I soon got the job at The Belfry.

“Also, don’t be despondent if you get to the final and don’t win. A nomination still does wonders for your CV and I know many of the finalists have gone on to have superb careers.”

In 1995 David moved to Forest Pines Hotel and Golf Resort close to his home town of Beverley, where he is still Head Greenkeeper today. He’s also Group Golf Course Manager for Q Hotels, who have four courses across the UK – including the course at Aldwick Manor. Finalists are still asked to produce a report on a specific aspect of the course as they were in 1990.