Behind the scenes at The Open 2013

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The 142nd Open Championship proved to be a real scourcher with the downpours of last year replaced by bright sunshine, at times intense heat and a true links look to the course. This all added up to a tough but fair challenge for the world’s best golfers, and Phil Mickelson’s 66 on the final day to secure the Claret Jug has already passed into the annals of golf history. Of course, the Support Team will be able to say “I was there”.

As well as the BIGGA Support Team, the home team headed by Course Manager Colin Irvine were assisted by a team of local greenkeepers from neighbouring courses at Gullane, Archerfield, Luffness and the Renaissance Club, plus a greenkeeper from each of the other Open venues and some on R&A scholarships.

On the very first morning Gary Salabury from Burnham Park Golf Club went out with Ed Cho, Miguel Angel Jimenez and the American Jimmy Walker. Gary said: “Jimmy seemed fascinated by my rake and asked how heavy it was and whether he could hold it. I replied that he could if he let me hold his driver to see how heavy it was!”

Gary Cunningham joined Justin Rose and saw a highly frustrating incident for the US Open winner: “He went to use the players’ toilet near the 6th only to find it was locked. He knocked on the door and a female spectator eventually emerged – she’d been changing in it. Rose’s face was a picture.”

John Keenaghan from Chipping Sodbury Golf Club saw an outrageous shot on the 9th during the Second Round: “Stephen Gallacher played his ball deliberately off a wall, on to the green, putted and made an eagle.”

The start of the Third Round saw two players struggle to make their 8.20am tee time. Michael Joyce from Moortown Golf Club witnessed the mayhem: “Carl Pettersson and Jonas Blixt were late and had to sprint to the tee chased by marshalls. The lack of preparation clearly didn’t affect Pettersson because he holed an iron shot from the fairway to eagle the 6th.”

As the crowds increased over the weekend, the team heard the occasional boisterous and bizarre shout from the public galleries. Adam Scott’s round on Saturday was followed by Richard Holmes from Croxall Heath Golf Club, and Richard said: “Scott was struggling on one hole and a fan shouted to his caddy Steve Williams ‘do something!’ Williams replied ‘what more do you want me to do? He’s just won the Masters’.

The final morning saw a relaxed Peter Senior chat to Stuart Ferguson from Dundas Park Golf Club. Stuart said: “At the start of the round Senior apologised to me for the amount of bunkers he was about to go into the end he hit six.”

The final day also saw drama at the 9th hole – but not the sort Jason Day was looking for. Gary Cunningham said: “Day bailed a shot into one of the stands and someone shouted ‘six’…but it was ‘caught out’ by a fan!”

The random draw to see who would accompany which player rewarded Jaey Goodchild from Bowood Golf & Country Club with the once-in-a-lifetime chance to follow fellow Aussie Adam Scott around the links as he made his bid for the Claret Jug on the penultimate round of the week.

Of course, there was to be no Aussie celebration, but Jaey summed the experience up by saying: “It was an awesome week and I was privileged to be part of it. I love the atmosphere at big events and when you get a bunch of guys together who are all there for the same reason, with the same mindset, and the team spirit is brilliant. I hope I get a chance to do it again one day.”

Michael Long from Littlestone Golf Club said: “It had a fantastic time working with superbly professional greenkeepers from around the country. I made a few good friends, and it’s great to spend time with others. It gives you a real buzz especially when the crowds are big.”

The Open 2013

From Crosland Heath Golf Club, was followed by Richard Holmes with Lee Westwood (photo by Richard Jenkinson)

Support Team to guess how far the tee shots went on Saturday.

Closest Guesses 260 Steven Matthews – 262

Closest Guess 444 John Keenaghan – 453

Overall. Here are the results:

Thursday – 453 Closest Guess: John Keenaghan
Friday – 577 Closest Guess: 260 Steven Lloyd & Gary Cunningham
Saturday – 279 Closest Guess: Adam Matthews

TOTAL – 1,571 Closest Guess 1,531 Jamie Reeves

Bunker Stats

Before the tournament began we asked all members of the Support Team to guess how many bunkers would be hit on each day, and the closest guesses with winners for each day and overall. Here are the results:

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At such a highly prestigious golf club, strangely great weather for Scotland as well which was a real bonus!”

Stefan Carter from Forest Hill Golf & Country Club added: “It’s been an amazing week with superb weather which has been a massive factor for us. It’s my first time doing anything like this and I can’t wait to do it again. I ranged for Lee Westwood which was a privilege – the only disappointment for me was he didn’t win it so I can’t say I was with the winner!”

Andy Slingaby from Halifax West End Golf Club said: “The organisation has been superb, everything about it has been first-class and it’s been a pleasure to be here. The weather’s been magnificent which has topped it off.”

Jamie Fetch from Sheringham Golf Club said: “Where else do you get the chance to follow the world’s greatest players up the fairways? I’ve found all the players to have been friendly and a lot of us have got signed golf balls and gloves. It gives you a real buzz especially when the crowds are big.”

The Muirfield team presented a true links course amid fabulous weather leading up to the tournament and during The Championship itself. Indeed, Support Team members who departed on the Monday after the tournament discovered that the weather had reverted to type with a steady drizzle accompanied by a cool breeze and mist, making the blazing sunshine and heat during the tournament all the more miraculously.

The fairways were cut at 14mm and the semi rough, which was around 3mm wide, was cut at 30mm but not daily. The second cut of rough was cut at 11 feet and allowed to go to seed. Before play the greens were double cut at 8mm. Officially, the greens were at 11 feet first thing on Thursday, then 10.5 for the rest of the week. Before the final round the greens were hand watered, as they were throughout. Before Friday and Sunday, some selected greens were hand rolled to bring them up to speed with others.
The Claret Jug has already passed to secure the world’s best golfer, and Phil Mickelson’s challenge for the world’s best all added up to a tough but fair looks to the course. This replaced by bright sunshine, at be a real scorcher with the Championship proved to tHe oPen 2013 from Crosland Heath Golf Club, was followed by Richard Holmes Adam Scott’s round on Saturday sowed drama at the 9th hole – but not the sort Jason Day was looking for. Gary Cunningham said: “Day backed a shot into one of the stands and someone shouted ‘six’…but it was ‘vaught out’ by a fan!” The random draw to see who would accompany which player around the links as he made his bid for the Claret Jug on the penultime round of the week. Of course, there was to be no Aussie celebration, but Jaey summed the experience up by saying: “It was an awesome week and I was privileged to be part of it. I love the atmosphere at big events and during The Open venues and some on R&A scholarships. On the very first morning Gary Salaberry from Brough Park Golf Club went out with Ed Choi, Miguel Angel Jimenez and the American Jimmy Walker. Gary said: ‘Jimmy seemed fascinated by my rake and asked how heavy it was and whether he could hold it. I replied that he could if he let me hold his driver to see how heavy it was!’ Gary Cunningham joined Justin Rose and saw a hugely frustrating incident for the US Open winner: “He went to use the players’ toilet near the 6th only to find it was locked. He knocked on the door and a female spectator eventually emerged – she’s been changing in it. Rose’s face was a picture.” John Keenaghan from Chipping had reverted to type with a steady drizzle accompanying a cool breeze and head during the tournament all the more miraculous. The fairways were cut at 14mm and the semi rough, which was around 19mm, was allowed to go to 35mm but not daily. The second cut of rough was cut at early June at 150mm and allowed to seed. Before play the greens were double cut at 14mm and the greens were at 11 feet first thing on Thursday, then lifted to level by the end of the week. Before the final round the greens were hand watered, as they were throughout. Before Friday and Sunday, some selected greens were hand rolled to bring them up to speed with others.

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DIARY FROM THE OPEN
– PHILLIP SNELLIN

I’m a greenkeeper at Donaghadee Golf Club where I have also been a member for 20 years. When I got into greenkeeping I never dreamed I would have the best week of my life doing something I love. I applied back in January to work at The Open and when I was accepted I was so excited, I told my Course Manager Aaron Small tell many stories about his time on the Support Team at Turnberry in 2009. I flew to Edinburgh and as soon as I arrived was made to feel so welcome. It was great to talk to so many other professionals in the same field as myself.

Before I knew it, Thursday morning had arrived and I was on the tee with my rake at 8am with Jason Day, Martin Kaymer and Garrick Porteous – what a fantastic experience. When I returned to the BIGGA cabin close to the first tee I shared my story with other greenkeepers who had got back and also chatted with those who were excitedly waiting to go out.

On the Friday I got what I thought was the dream draw – Tom Watson, Fred Couples and Sir Nick Faldo! Just watching them hit shots is something I will remember forever. I didn’t think it could get any better than that until I was drawn to accompany game number 41 for the Saturday. The cut was at +7 for ages which would have meant I wouldn’t have had a game, but when it went to +8 I ended up with Tiger Woods and Lee Westwood. They are two of my favourite golfers of the modern era so being inside the ropes walking behind them is the greatest moment of my golfing life bar none. What a day it was watching them play and I only had seven bunkers to rake behind them.

On the Sunday I was with Boo Weekley and Thongchai Jaidee who were really nice guys and chatted to us walking up the fairways. After the game was over I retired to the BIGGA marquee to watch the last few holes on TV before heading out for photos on the 18th fairway.

I have met so many greenkeepers who have become great friends, just chatting to them all and asking them about their courses and how they do things has been brilliant and I urge any greenkeeper to apply to work on a support team at a major championship and they will feel the same.

Lastly I want to say a massive thank you to Donaghadee Golf Club and all the BIGGA staff for their help and support in what has been the best week of my life and I will definitely be doing it again in the future.

Thank You from BIGGA

Once again, thank you to Sherriff Amenity for kindly sponsoring the internet in the BIGGA marquee keeping the Support Team connected. During the prolonged dry spell, several of the team used this facility to monitor their course irrigation so it proved to be an invaluable resource.

We are also very grateful to Ransomes Jacobsen for providing the rucksacks used by the team – this year they were mostly used to carry water and suncream rather than rain jackets! Also, many thanks to the R&A for working with us to support the entire team before, during and after the event.
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Phillip Snellin (photo by Richard Jenkinson)