My first BTME began early on the Sunday morning. After briefly helping out with registration I joined a group of ten greenkeepers – mostly deputies in the ‘So You Want to be a Golf Course Manager’ Workshop in the Queen’s Suite on the first morning.

This two-day Workshop was jointly presented by Peter Jones, Principal Consultant at PJA Golf Consultancy and Kevin Munt, Principal Consultant at KMgc – and they immediately instigated an ‘Ice Breaker’ where the delegates interviewed each other to put everyone at ease.

What struck me immediately was how forthcoming and honest the attendees were. All manner of subjects – from politics in the golf club to health and safety issues – were discussed within the framework of a series of modules designed to prepare you for a Course Management role. It was well-paced and highly informative – and the group of ten meant that all the attendees mingled well and had considerable input.

After the sessions Craig Wilson, greenkeeper from St Andrews Links Trust, said: “It’s been very worthwhile. The presenters were very well-prepared and I can take so much knowledge from it as I progress my career.”

All the other sessions covered a huge range of the skills required at all levels of the industry including ‘Improve Your IT Skills’ hosted by Jacky Lowe from Training Gem, ‘Irrigation System Design and Water Management’ with Adrian Mortram of Robin Hume Associates and Frank Newberry’s ‘Moving Into Management’.

The evening saw turf professionals from across the world mingling with BIGGA HQ staff at Albert’s restaurant. Remarkably, the restaurant was marking its final night of business. It was a microcosm of BTME – board members mingling with greenkeepers, international turf experts and motivational leaders. I took the opportunity to have a quick chat with Curtis Tyrrell, who revealed he had thrown himself into British culture by sampling curry, then fish and chips for the first time in his life!

The Workshops continued on Monday and overnight snow did not deter greenkeepers from across the UK attending the third Turf Managers’ Conference – held for the first time outside the main Halls at The Crown Hotel, a mere snowball toss from the Harrogate International Centre.

Some delegates showed superb commitment to drive long distances in tricky conditions and were rewarded with an opening presentation from the charismatic Dr Thom Nikolai concentrating on lightweight rolling. Meanwhile, the HIC was a hive of activity as the final preparations were made to transform the previously empty halls into a suitably impressive showcase for new products and machinery.

It was remarkable to see how physical exertion and meticulous planning combined as contractors worked throughout the afternoon and early evening to build stands, roll in machinery and prepare for the biggest turf exhibition in Europe.
As the education continued, BIGGA Chairman Tony Smith cut the ribbon to officially open the exhibition – joined by Vice-Chairman Chris Sealey and CEO Jim Croxton. He would later describe as one of the “greatest honours” of his life. Visitors immediately poured into the halls, with a real buzz developing through the morning as hundreds of greenkeepers, exhibitors and all manner of turf industry professionals mingled to talk business, examine new and exciting products, or catch up over a quick coffee.

The Centre – lighter and more spacious due to its new home in Hall E – swung into action with a media briefing. The Golden Girls proved predictably popular, as did the professional dancers and the excellent meal. As the evening progressed various courses could be heard emanating from the busy gambling tables – fortunately no real money was frittered away.

For the more competitive, a virtual Aston Martin driving game was also on show with a few controversial corner cutting manoeuvres resulting in the odd ‘road rage’ incident on the track. Top gambler proved to be Helen Russell – wife of Geoff from Golf Business News – who won a bottle of champagne. She narrowly pipped Carl Chamberlain from Rigby Taylor. Fastest lap on the driving game – also scooping a bottle of champagne – was Phil Chadwick from Bailey Irrigation Controls.

After a successful yet tiring day, a celebratory evening was required and the main hall at the Old Swan Hotel – the BIGGA team’s base for the week – was transformed into an impressive 007-themed arena. The Golden Girls proved predictably popular, as did the professional dancers and the excellent meal. As the evening progressed various courses could be heard emanating from the busy gambling tables – fortunately no real money was frittered away.

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**TUESDAY**

**WEDNESDAY**

With the roads clearing and snow warnings vanishing, the middle day of the exhibition saw things really accelerate in the halls, attended a packed media briefing mid-morning on the Everris stand and was genuinely staggered to see how busy the halls had become, with some visitors having to jostle for space. As Lee Price from Myerscough College commented – the halls were “saturated” as unique visitors arrived joining those who were returning for a second day.

The evening saw success rewarded at the BTGF Environmental Awards dinner at the terrific Hotel du Vin, while the hardier visitors continued enjoying the restauants, pubs and bars of Harrogate. It’s no exaggeration to say the local economy enjoyed a considerable boost when BTME rolled into town.

**THURSDAY**

Traditionally the quietest day, visitor numbers held up in comparison to previous years and with no activity in the Media Centre it gave me a chance to speak to some of the exhibitors to gauge the mood. I was pleased to see many still busy and deep in conversation with visitors, although I had chance to grab a quick chat with Richard Fry of Rigby Taylor, who pronounced himself “very, very happy” with how the week had gone.

Another feature of BTME 2013 was the proliferation of international visitors – statistics showed 10% of delegates had flown in from overseas reinforcing the association’s claim it was truly a global show.

It was a tired but happy BIGGA team that slowly returned home after the event which the rest of the year always leads up to. There was a real feeling of a job well done – but it would be foolish to be complacent. Trade shows must continue to evolve, and the hundreds of comments gathered this week – both positive and negative – will be taken on board as preparations begin for what promises to be an even bigger show next January.

121 exhibitors travelled from far and wide to BTME 2013. The staggering variety of exhibitors is unsurpassed in the turf industry – from colleges to major machinery companies, from sustainability and charitable organisations to golf art stands. I finally had the opportunity to tour the halls as the exhibition due to a close on Thursday and was amazed to see the variety of stands, products and items on offer. We were very grateful to Baracca – who were located close to the BIGGA stand in Hall B – for sponsoring the promotional bags and lanyards and it was clear that they were enjoying a successful BTME. Baracca Managing Director Ian Kerry, below, said: “I can honestly say it’s been a fantastic show. We’ve had quality visitors expressing genuine interest, for example we’ve had enquiries about denoting some of our products in February with a real view to buying in March and April.

“The exhibition really is complemented by the education BIGGA put on, which in my opinion is the pinnacle of the turf industry, it attracts greenkeepers who then attend the exhibition later in the week.”

Thanks to all the exhibitors who defined some difficult travelling conditions before the exhibition to make the journey to Harrogate. For more exhibitor viewpoints, please turn to page 26 where Jim Cook speaks to several at the show.
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Exhibitors in pictures

A snapshot of the exhibitors on show in the packed halls of the Harrogate International Centre

Amongst the many highlights of our Continue to Learn Programme were the Ryder Cup themed sessions on the Tuesday.

This began in the early afternoon as Curtis Tyrrell MG, Director of Golf Course Operations at the Medinah Country Club, presented ‘Ryder Cup 2012 – Preparations, Challenges, Outcomes’. The audience was enthralled as the amiable American explained the incredible level of preparation, and attention to detail required to host one of the world’s biggest sporting events.

Steve Chappell, Head Greenkeeper at the PGA Centenary Course at Gleneagles, then took things a step further by revealing his challenges and aims as the legendary venue prepares for the Ryder Cup next year. Later in the afternoon, Curtis and Steve were joined by Jim McKenzie from Celtic Manor, who led his team through atrocious conditions during the 2010 tournament. They were asked a series of questions by the attendees rounding off a truly unique day of industry education.

Greg Skinner from Forest Hill Golf and Country Club spoke for many of the delegates when he said: “It was compelling and exceptionally well presented. Curtis’s experience is almost a different world to what some of the guys here are involved in on a day to day basis, but it really was a fascinating afternoon.”

The one and two day workshops held on the Sunday and Monday were very successful with Thom Nikolai’s ‘ABC’s of Putting Green Maintenance’ and Paul Miller’s ‘Turfgrass Plant’ and ‘Soils for Fine Turf in particular receiving rave reviews.

The new for 2013 bite size ‘Focus On’ sessions on the Tuesday and Wednesday were another success looking at specific subjects within the areas of Management, Technical, Computer Skills and Ecology.

These sessions complemented the ever popular fringe seminars. One such seminar was ‘New XC Technology – a Breakthrough in Application Technology for Golf’. This looked at Syngenta’s specially designed new XC nozzles which are designed to revolutionise the application of foliar applied products to golf courses and other sloping areas. Syngenta’s Technical Manager Simon Watson was joined by Technical Sales Manager Henry Bechelet to explore its possibilities and answer questions.

Lee Relf travelled from Widdrness Golf Club in Kent and said: “It’s been brilliant. I did the Diagnostics and Problem Solving workshop on Monday, which was really good and have been to a lot of the seminars. The education is always first class.”

Curtis Tyrrell added: “I’ve had the greatest feedback on my presentation. It’s a great setup you’ve got here. I’ve seen some cool stuff and it’s been a first class show.”

Thanks to everyone who attended the seminars, workshops and BTME 2013. Over 180 hours of top class education took place with the Queen’s Suite buzzing throughout. Rest assured planning has already begun for another superb education programme at BTME 2014.

TOP LEFT: Past, Present and Future of the Ryder Cup

TOP RIGHT: A packed room for Steve Chappell’s ‘A Journey to the Ryder Cup’ seminar

ABOVE: Curtis Tyrrell

RIGHT: Henry Bechelet (left) and Simon Watson at the Syngenta seminar

BELOW: A busy Queen’s Suite