Jim McKenzie was in the middle of the worst day of his professional life. It was Sunday morning and The Ryder Cup, the event he’d been dreaming about and praying for since 1996, was in the middle of its second long rain delay.

Play wasn’t going to finish that day and there was a prospect of the match not going the full distance for the first time in its illustrious history. "I was in need of a lift so went down to the hotel and had a chat with Debbie, my wife, which cheered me up a bit and on the way back I came out of the lift and bumped into Colin Montgomerie. He said, ‘Come with me,’ and we sat in a corner and had a coffee," revealed Jim.

“Colin said, ‘The bottom line is this. We’re currently two points down and if we don’t play today all the matches out there will be declared halved, and we’re up on all six of them at the moment. If that happens we’ll go into the Singles still two points down and we’re not traditionally strong in the Singles. If we can get all the matches completed this afternoon it gives us a chance’," recalled Jim.

With that message ringing in his ears Jim returned to his men – 65 of his own Celtic Manor staff and 71 volunteer greenkeepers – and urged them to lift their tired bodies once again for yet another monumental effort.

“I told them that I’d just spoken to Colin and that he’s asked that if there was any way we could get play going we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup,”

And that is exactly what happened. The crew worked tirelessly to make the saturated course playable for an afternoon start and the players did their bit by turning their overnight leads into five and a half points out of six.

“If we hadn’t pulled it off on Sunday we would have gone into the Singles two points down and we would probably have got no more than nine points, instead of the magic 14.5.

“The shift that the guys put in on that Sunday afternoon, and the Saturday night before, was absolutely astonishing – outrageous! And that Sunday afternoon turned out to be the greatest day in the history of European golf,” said Jim, who is not one given to hyperbole. Weather conditions were always the one nagging doubt about the 2010 Ryder Cup. The venue was custom built to cope with the demands of the third biggest sporting event in the world and no stone had been left untumed in ensuring a successful Cup.

However, the pressures on the worldwide golfing calendar had pushed the match into October for only the second time in its history and the South Wales weather can be notoriously fickle. And so it was. “We had 55% of our monthly rainfall in two days – about two inches,” said Jim, who did say that a Wales Open of a few years ago had endured three inches of rain and finished within half an hour of its scheduled time.

Colin asked if there was any way we could get play going, we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup”  Jim McKenzie
“The work that the boys put in on the Friday had to be seen to be believed. Sir Terry Matthews actually came down to tell the guys that they had probably saved the Ryder Cup, and I told them that they had put the matches back on track.”

Jim McKenzie

“We were up all Thursday night managing the arrival of the lorries. It wasn’t quite the start to the Ryder Cup that I’d envisaged. So I put my thoughts to me about the 1st tee for the first game,” said Jim, who is now the only greenkeeper in history to have managed a course for a Monday finish of a Ryder Cup.

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Jim Mckenzie

We were up all Thursday night managing the arrival of the lorries. It wasn’t quite the start to the Ryder Cup that I’d envisaged, but I found myself standing of the 1st tee for the first time. I was thrilled, said Jim, who is now the managing director of the Ryder Cup. We had a great week and I think the boys put in a fantastic performance. Jim was looking forward to the 2010 event and said, “It’s going to be a great week and I’m looking forward to seeing the boys perform.”

I saw three shots all week and two of them were putts. I laughed, adding that he had watched Graeme McDowell’s heroics on the 16th and attempt to get to the 17th only by sandbagging the narrow opening. Jim was happy with the performance of the greenkeeping crew and said, “It was a fantastic week and I’m looking forward to seeing the boys perform.”

I was told that there was room for the seating area of the Closing Ceremony for all which was marvellous. The police gave me a framed photograph taken from a helicopter on the 17th tee and below, the same hole he had watched Matt Parziale’s heroics on the 16th.

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With the course scheduled to host the Wales Open in May, next year and the last of the structures not due to leave site until December 6 time is tight and although the Roman Road Course, has hosted the Wales Open before and could do so again, there is pressure for the 2010 course to put its best foot forward again.

“It’s going to be a combination of seeding, turfing, harrowing and rolling. No rest for the wicked, I’m afraid.”

So, a week on from that famous Monday, what were Jim’s reflections?

“The greatest highs and the greatest lows of my entire life, all in the space of four days. Friday morning and Sunday morning were extraordinary lows, and Monday afternoon, when it was all over and the guys were getting that ovation, was the greatest high of my career.”

He also had nothing but praise for his crew.

“They were working from 5am to 8pm a lot of the time in the cold and wet. We tried to keep them warm and we fed them well, but there was a lot of down time waiting for the rain to stop. It was actually very humbling to watch.”

And how close did the Ryder Cup come to not finishing with all 28 points accounted for and, possibly, a different result?

“Probably a couple of hours, possibly just an hour, because if we’d started any later on the Sunday we wouldn’t have had Saturday completed and if we hadn’t finished there was no guarantee that we would have finished on Monday.”

A lot has been written and a lot has been said about the 2010 Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor Resort but no man, outside of Captains and players, experienced it in quite the same way as Jim McKenzie.

**Ryder Cup Memories**

Jim McKenzie was followed down the 18th by his 140 greenkeepers. I was one of the crew of the 1st fairway. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he wasgreenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared in front of the greenkeepers and walked back to the 18th tee, from where he was introduced at the end of the Closing Ceremony.
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What a week

Peter Holmstrom has always dreamed of helping Europe win the Ryder Cup. Ideally this would be during a tournament played in front of a packed home crowd in Wales. It just so happens that some dreams do come true. Peter picks up the story...

“I have been working with Jim McKenzie, the Course Manager at Celtic Manor for over four years through my role as a Technical Sales Regional Manager with Countrywide. As a result, Jim invited me to join the 70 strong greenkeeping Support Team for the duration of the Ryder Cup. I knew it would be a special occasion and a high point in my career, but I didn’t anticipate just how much the event would be, for the players, the staff, the spectators and for Wales itself.”

Peter is a proud Welshman, Newport born and bred, and whose links with Celtic Manor go back many years.

I am so proud of the resort anyway. I remember when construction at Celtic Manor first started, as a teenager I watched as the resort gradually took shape, and at 16 years of age I first worked at Celtic Manor as part of my schools work experience scheme.

I was invited to return to the resort 15 years later as part of a specialist team of greenkeepers. It was a huge honour and I am a massive golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a driver during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, “can you use it”, he asked, to which I said “No, it’s too stiff.”

“That’s why I gave it to you in the first place”, he replied.

On the Wednesday the rain came, 15mm fell in four hours. With both teams out on the course practicing the rain came down heavier and puddles were starting to form on the greens, I jogged up with three other greenkeepers to remove water from various putting greens.

On Thursday, walking from the 8th to the 9th tee, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. Would I be brave enough to ask Tiger Woods for his autograph and did I obligate. I have his signature on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from our tour.

After lunch we were allocated the job of placing wood chip bark bags on the course for players and spectators to get easier access around the wetter areas of the golf club. In convoy we headed out in club cars loaded with chip. We stopped to watch the Opening Ceremony, including the raising of the flag, introduction of the players, all accompanied by Katherine Jenkins singing.

Following this we headed out to more chip bark bags until got dark, completing a 15 hour shift. Exhausted, I arrived back at the ward to see 29 tonnes of wood chip being delivered.

Sun 3 Oct – European golf’s finest day

Rain was pouring hard again and all the talk was about how the course hadn’t been this flooded - wouldn’t the first Ryder Cup to be cancelled?

Overnight Europe were leading in all six matches but if play did not start by 18.43 all matches would be deemed a half if play did continue. We started by giving the leaders more chip and greenkeeping support.

The weather took a break and at 10.30 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and fairways, pumping water out of the bunkers and raking up all the washed down sand. That evening I watched myself raking a bunker on the 18th fairway on the 9th.

We all worked for hours and were absolutely shattered by the end but somehow we managed to play right to 12.00 - a day that would go on to be remembered as Europe’s finest day!
What a week

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The team was due to work from Monday, September 27, through; preparation and practice days, the tournament itself starting on Friday October 1 and finally for the first time ever, Monday, October 4.

Peter was aware that the biggest challenge would be the weather, “If you’re not then moving moisture off the course becomes key. The course has been prepared for the worst, for example, on the chipping and putting green practice area, which has limited irrigation, I have worked with Celtic Manor in the build up to the event by supplying a maximum moisture retention material through a 4mm screened peat and sand mixture dressed into the grass sward. Although we know how disruptive the weather might be, no one anticipated just how disruptive the weather would be, no one anticipated just how disruptive the weather would be as the resort had never been this wet.

Ryder Cup to be cancelled? The second match arrived but play was suspended. We tried to clear the course at midday but to no avail.

The rain just came harder. The final shots came at 3.15 - we were to try again. I left with my “pump team” to clear water from the bunkers and push water off the greens and fairways - it was hard work. Finally, seven and a half hours later, play resumed.

The tournament
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The weather broke and at 10.30 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and fairways, pumping water out of the bunkers and raking up all the washed down sand. (That evening I watched myself as a bunker on the 18th fairway on the 19th).

We all worked so hard and were absolutely shattered by the end but somehow we managed to get play started by 12.00 - a day that would go on to be remembered as Europe’s golf’s finest day!

As this was the final day, everything was to be cut and presented perfectly, and despite the rainfall of the last five days, the course was immaculate.

Our work finally completed we were able to go out and watch as Europe reclaimed the Ryder Cup by a single point. We watched as the players celebrated with countless thousands of fans.

The Ryder Cup isn’t just about playing golf; it’s about the experience too. This year the events were held in front of a packed home crowd in Wales.

It’s amazing how close you get to the stars!

Mon 27 - Thur 30 Sep

Each day we would start work before Sam, arriving at the greenkeeping service compound to be greeted by Jim McKenzie and to be given our respective jobs. We would work until lunchtime, and then following some free time, do our jobs for the afternoon. 12 – 15 hour days were not unusual.

I was delegated the task of being in the special maintenance group for the week which means that I support the fairway cutting crew, possibly raking bunkers during the matches and any other special maintenance to be carried out in the course.

During my allocated time, I was lucky enough to meet some golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a driver during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, “Can you use it?” he asked, to which I said, “No, it’s too stiff.”

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The Ryder Cup is awarded to the winner of the biennial team golf competition between the male golfers of the United States of America and Europe.

The Ryder Cup, the first Ryder Cup was played in 1927 at Carnoustie Golf Club, Carnoustie, Scotland, and was won by the United States.

During the 2010 Ryder Cup, the team was based at Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, Wales.

The Ryder Cup was won by the team from Europe in 2010 by 14½ to 13½ points.

The Ryder Cup is played over two days of four-ball matches and two days of singles matches.

The tournament is held every two years alternately in the United States and Europe.

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Golf of the highest standard

Faced with the challenge of two of the finest inland courses in England, BIGGA’s best golfers rose to the challenge, and the scores they posted over The Berkshire’s illustrious Blue and Red courses were extremely impressive.

To illustrate, one handicapper, John McLoughlin, of Grange Park Golf Club, in Liverpool, had to reload on the 1st on day one, had a treacherous par-3 and ran up a 5, though he played the next 17 holes in five under par for a superb 68.

Despite playing the Red Course in a very respectable four over par 76 his 144 total was only good enough for third overall.

Eventual winner, Paul Frith, thought he had too much to do when a third of the way round on the second day. He was one over par playing with John, who was one under at the time.

“I reckoned I was around six shots behind but had a strong back nine, as I’d had on the opening day, and John started to drop a few shots and I just made it,” said Paul, who was Leicestershire County Captain from 1998-2001.

The scratch man who played off +2 for around six years had previously won a host of events in the Midland area including a stellar year in ’93 when he won the County Championship, Amateur Championship, and County Open in a field which included pros but he sees his latest win as one of his best.

“There was a very good field with some low handicappers in it and being a National title it means a lot to me,” said Paul who just edged +2 man, Laurie Tremlett, on a card play-off.

Paul was familiar with the two courses having played in The Berkshire Trophy about five or six times.

“Spectacular surroundings inspired the players in the 2010 BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse”

“Tremendous scores were posted by the best golfers”

Paul Frith, Challenge Trophy winner
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Paul Frith, Challenge Trophy Winner

“I made the cut every time and my best finish was 11th,” he said. “I would hope to come back and defend the title next year at West Lancs Golf Club. I’ve not played the course before but I’ve heard some good reports about it.”

John McPherson had more reason than most to celebrate the biggest win of his golfing career when he lifted the BIGGA Challenge Cup for Best Nett.

Twelve months before he had been competing well at Burnham and Berrow Golf Club but fell foul of a scorecard error and was disqualified from the overall event.

His playing partner had marked him down for a 4 at the 8th when he’d actually taken 5.

“John McPherson had more reason than most to celebrate the biggest win of his golfing career when he lifted the BIGGA Challenge Cup for Best Nett.”

Spectacular surroundings inspired the players in the 2010 BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse.
“I’ve paid my own entry fee both last year and this and I’ll be looking to defend my title next year. It’s a wonderful event - I really enjoyed it”
John McPherson, Challenge Cup Winner

“I drove really well on the first and then it was my putting that was great on the second,” said John, who shot nett rounds of 67 and 68.

John moved south two and a half years ago having worked, and learned his golf, at Callander Golf Club, in Perthshire.

“I’ve paid my own entry fee both last year and this and I’ll certainly be looking to defend my title next year. It really is a wonderful event and I really enjoy playing in it,” he said.

John finished three shots clear of handicap, Ed Ainsworth, who followed up a solid nett 72 on the opening day with a spectacular nett 66 on the second.

Paul Davey was third with a nett 142.

Alastair Higgins clinched the Day 2 Stableford with 39 points and Darren Mitchell, won the Affiliate Prize.

The Regional Cup, played for on the opening day was won by the South East with a score of 274.

The event was sponsored by Kibota and Charterhouse with Colin Hood, from the former, and Nick Darking and Richard Heywood, from the latter, on hand to offer support to the players.

Another feature of this year’s Championship was the opportunity to win a £20,000 Mini Clubman car, courtesy of Rigby Taylor.

The car was on offer for a hole-in-one at one hole on each of the two days but unfortunately, despite some gallant efforts no-one drove it.

BIGGA would like to thank Kibota and Charterhouse for their title sponsorship as well as hole sponsors - Tony, Burden’s Golf and Turf, Pinseeker, Irritech, Taucit, Irrigation Control and Headland Amenity.

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The Berkshire Course (16th hole) went unclaimed.

The Hole-in-One Prize of a Mini Clubman car sponsored by Rigby Taylor was won by Nick McPherson, Challenge Cup Winner.

The BIGGA Challenge Trophy was won by Brian Barrow, 2nd Card Playoff
John McLoughlin, 3rd
Alistair Higgs, 4th
Tim Morgan, 5th

BIGGA Challenge Bowl (Affiliate Prize) was won by Alistair Higgs, 39 pts

BIGGA Challenge Plate \(\text{(Affiliate Prize)}\) was won by Alistair Higgs, 39 pts

BIGGA Challenge Cup \(\text{(Best Gross)}\) was won by Paul Frith, 143 \(\text{(Card Play-off)}\)
Laurie Tremlett, 143
John McLoughlin 144

BIGGA Challenge Trophy \(\text{(Best nett)}\) was won by John McPherson, 167
Ed Ainsworth, 148
Laurie Tremlett, 143

BIGGA Regional Bowl (Amateur stroke play) was won by Tim Morgan

BIGGA Regional Cup \(\text{(Best nett Regional nett)}\) was won by Alistair Higgs

SPECIAL PRIZES

Day 1
3-12 Alex Thompson 146
3-12 Jon History

Day 2
3-12 John Haston
3-12 Jon History

SPECIAL PRIZES

Day 1
2-00 John Haston
3-12 Jon History

Day 2
2-00 John Haston
3-12 Jon History

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